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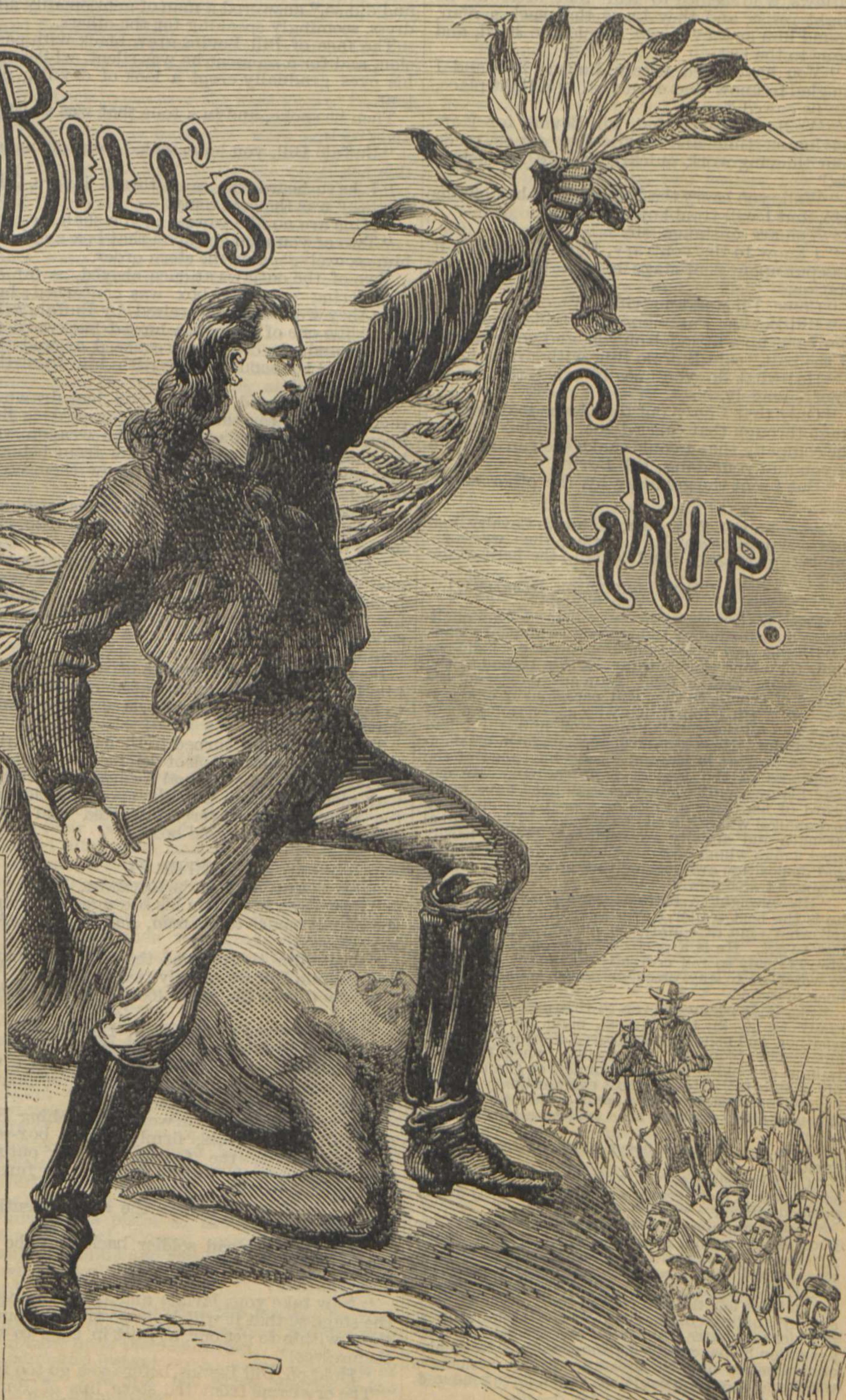
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No. 362

BUFFALO BILL'S



OR,

OATH-BOUND to CUSTER.

A Romance of a Real Trail that ended in the avenging of the heroes, Custer and his Three Hundred Troopers who fell in "Sitting Bull's Battle of the Big Horn."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE LEAGUE OF THREE," "MERLE,
THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCIFUL,"
"THE SPECTER YACHT," "FLO-
RETTE, CHILD OF THE STREET," "THE
DESERT PRINCE," "JULE, THE
JEWESS," "THE PRINCE OF THE
PRAIRIE," "MOTHERLESS,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BUFFALO BILL THWARTS A VILLAIN.

"LIVE or die! Take your choice!"

The words rung out in clarion tones, stern, threatening and startling, and the one who gave utterance to them covered the heart of the one he addressed with a revolver.

"THE FIRST SCALP FOR CUSTER."

Buffalo Bill's Grip.

The speaker had suddenly sprung out from the roadside, and half a score of armed men were at his back, and as many rifles were leveled upon the driver of the Overland stage, whose further progress had been checked by their unexpected and unwelcome presence.

The man upon the stage box, and who held the ribbons over the backs of six stylish grays, was Buffalo Bill, a man known through the length and breadth of our land as the King of the Bordermen.

The one who thus barred his way with a threat of death was Bill Bevins, the Chief of the Bandits of the Overland, and a man who had sworn to have the life of the noted plainsman, against whom he had long held a grudge.

Within the stage were half a dozen passengers, and they sat in silent suspense, not knowing what would follow the dread words that had fallen so startlingly upon their ears.

"Up with your hands, or die! Come, take your choice, Buffalo Bill!"

The threatening words had been repeated, as Buffalo Bill had simply reined his horses to a halt and still grasped the lines.

He saw at a glance that an outlaw had sprung to the head of each horse, and that he was covered by several rifles as well as the revolver in the hand of Bill Bevins.

With no change of expression even, and not the quiver of a muscle, he answered, calmly:

"As you hold trumps in this game, Bill Bevins, up goes my hands."

The reins were given a turn around the lantern, and Buffalo Bill coolly raised his hands above his head, to the apparent relief of the outlaws, who seemed to fear that after all he might resist, and they knew that such a man, wound him as they might, would die hard, and game to the last.

"You have acted wisely, Buffalo Bill, and I am glad to know that even you, in a tight place, can be cowed."

"We'll not discuss that, Bill Bevins, for I am driving on time and anxious to get on, so do your thieving work quickly, and do not detain me."

"Well, you carry the Express gold-box on this trip, and I will trouble you for it."

"You are mistaken, sir."

"I know to the contrary, Buffalo Bill, for it was put upon your stage at the Head-quarter Station.

"Come, I'll stand no trifling."

"Bill Bevins, I am no man to trifle, and I tell you I put up a little job on you, and you grabbed at the bait," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"Ha! what do you mean?" cried the bandit chief, savagely.

"Only that I gave out that I was to drive the stage through that carried the gold-box, telling the company that I could make the run in spite of you and your gang, Bill Bevins."

"But I sent the gold-box by the other stage,

NOTE.—Lt. Col. E. A. Carr, of the 5th Cavalry, and Brevet-Major-General U. S. Army, thus wrote regarding W. F. Cody, (Buffalo Bill,) the hero of my story:

FORT MCPHERSON, NEBRASKA,

July 3d, 1878.

"From his services with my command, I am qualified to bear testimony to his qualities and character.

"He was very modest and unassuming. I did not know for a long time how good a title he had to the appellation, 'Buffalo Bill.' I am apt to discount the claims of scouts, as they will occasionally exaggerate; and when I found one who said nothing about himself, I did not think much of him, till I had proved him. He is a natural gentleman in his manners as well as in character, and has none of the roughness of the typical frontiersman. He can take his own part when required, but I have never heard of his using a knife or a pistol, or engaging in a quarrel where it could be avoided. His personal strength and activity are such that he can hardly meet a man whom he cannot handle, and his temper and disposition are so good that no one has reason to quarrel with him."

"His eyesight is better than a good field-glass; he is the best trailer I ever heard of; he is able to tell what kind of country is ahead, so as to know how to act. He is a perfect judge of distance, and always ready to tell correctly how many miles it is to water, or to any place, or how many miles have been marched. * * * *

"Mr. Cody seemed never to tire, and was always ready to go in the darkest night or the worst weather, and usually volunteered, knowing what the emergency required. His trailing, when following Indians or looking for stray animals or game, is simply wonderful. He is a most extraordinary hunter. I could not believe that a man could be certain to shoot antelope running till I had seen him do it so often."

"In a fight Cody is never noisy, obstreperous or excited."

"Cody has since served with me as post guide and scout at Fort McPherson, where he frequently distinguished himself. * * * *

"In the summer of 1876, Cody went with me to the Black Hills region, where he killed Yellow Hand. Afterward he was with the Big Horn and Yellowstone expedition. I consider that his services to the country and the army by trailing, finding and fighting Indians, and thus protecting the frontier settlers, and by guiding commands over the best and most practicable routes, have been far beyond the compensation he has received. Personally, I feel under obligations to him for assistance in my campaigns which no other man could, or would, have rendered."

E. A. CARR. Lt. Col. 5th Cavalry,
Brevet-Major Gen. U. S. Army."

with all the valuables of the passengers here with me, and in watching for me, you miserable trail robber, you allowed Nick Roberts to go by with the dust, thinking he was too little game for you.

"Do you catch onto my little racket, Billy?" Buffalo Bill laughed lightly as he spoke, although he saw the faces of the men before him grow black with rage.

"Buffalo Bill, do you tell the truth?" demanded the outlaw captain, in hoarse, quivering tones.

"You are welcome to search the old ark, Bill Bevins, and inside are two ladies, a tenderfoot from the East, a soldier and a Chinee Heathen, and you can ask them if they didn't send on their valuables with Nick Roberts, all excepting the cavalryman, and he was of course dead broke as all soldiers are, and had nothing that you could steal."

"Yes, you are the loser this game, my gallant captain of the Overland thieves."

The outlaw chief was white with passion, and stepping to the stage door threw it open, and said, sternly:

"You heard what that man on the box said?"

Several bowed in silence, while the Heathen Chinee said:

"Yes, talkie straightee, Buffalo Billee muchee goodee 'Mericana man."

"Savee Chin Chin washee monee."

"Silence, you infernal Chinee!"

"You, sir, I ask, does Buffalo Bill tell the truth?"

"He does; we were advised by the superintendent to send our valuables by the other stage and did so," answered a man of gentlemanly address, seemingly speaking for the others.

The face of Bill Bevins grew black with passion, and for a moment he was silent, while into his eyes gradually crept a look of devilish intent.

Then he spoke, and in a tone that was sinister and cruel:

"Buffalo Bill, you have sealed your doom by this act."

"I have heard the same threat before, Bill Bevins," was the cool reply.

"Mine are no idle words, as you shall see."

"Two of you men get upon that box and bind him securely," came the stern order.

Two of the outlaws at once obeyed, as far as clambering upon the box was concerned; but then they were suddenly seized by Buffalo Bill, and while one of them was hurled backward to the ground, the other was grasped around the waist, and the scout sprung with him from the box.

As they alighted, Buffalo Bill had drawn a revolver, and was throwing it forward to fire upon the outlaw chief, when the weapon was knocked from his hand by a blow from behind, and several of the bandits threw themselves upon him.

"Upon your lives do not kill, or harm him!" shouted Bill Bevins, springing forward to join in the fight for mastery.

"Come, friends, now to the brave man's rescue!" cried the soldier, springing from the stage, to fall a corpse as his feet touched the ground, for the chief had heard his words and turning suddenly upon him, had sent a bullet into his brain.

Borne down by the weight of numbers, Buffalo Bill, giant in strength that he is, was unable to break from his foes, and was securely bound, hands and feet.

Then the bandits turned to their chief for further orders, and the look of fiendish cruelty upon his face proved that he had formed some diabolical plot to avenge himself upon his old-time foe, who had so cleverly thwarted him from seizing the Express gold-box.

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLAIN'S REVENGE.

"Now drag him upon his box again," ordered the bandit leader to his men, and with an effort they obeyed.

"Lash him there!" was the next command, and Buffalo Bill was firmly tied to the box.

"Now throw the reins loosely over the foot-board!"

This order was also obeyed, Buffalo Bill the while looking calmly on, evidently anticipating the heinous crime his enemy intended, yet uttering no word, and with not one atom of fear of his fate visible upon his fine face.

Having executed their work, by lashing Buffalo Bill with lariats, firmly to the box-seat, and his feet to the foot-board, the outlaws turned again to their cruel captain for further orders.

They were given, and in the same relentless, sinister tone:

"Throw that dead soldier back into the old hearse!"

It was done.

"Now take your lariats and tie them around the stage so that it will be impossible for one of those within to get out, at least in time to save themselves!"

"Hold on, Bill Bevins, before you go too far!"

The cry came from the stern lips of Buffalo Bill, who heard the command of his foe.

The outlaw turned with a wicked smile upon his bound prisoner, and asked:

"With what do you threaten me, Bill Cody?"

"The worst fate that ever met mortal man, if you dare to commit the cruel deed you have in view," was the bold reply.

"Dead men tell no tales, Buffalo Bill," sneered the outlaw.

"Oh, yes they do, for the fate of those in this stage will soon become known, and you'll find there are men who dwell on this border that will hunt you down to a worse death than that you visit upon us."

"You know then what I intend shall be your doom, it seems?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

"To prevent the passengers of this stage from getting out, and then leading the horses to yonder fork of the road, to turn them loose and force them down Breakneck Hill."

"You are right, Buffalo Bill, for such is my intention," was the bold reply.

"Look here, man, these passengers have done you no wrong," urged Buffalo Bill.

"You lie! they cheated me out of their valuables," was the savage retort.

"No, it was I did that, for I told them to send everything by Nick's coach, as ours would be the one halted on this trip, so visit your revenge upon me and let them go free," was the noble request of the scout.

"Oh, I shall have my revenge upon you, and upon them, too."

"You, Buffalo Bill, I know are the chief scout at the fort, and you went out of your way to pretend that you would drive the gold-coach through, and I owe you a debt for it that I shall now settle."

"And, my handsome plainsman, I have not forgotten that some years ago you captured me and sent me to prison."

"Where you deserve to go, as a horse-thief and cut-throat," was the fearless response.

The outlaw leader laughed lightly, for he felt that his time of revenge had come, and without reply he turned to his men, who had most securely enwrapped the stage in their lariats, in such a way that neither door could be opened, or a person get out without great difficulty and spending considerable time in doing so.

The passengers within seemed almost dazed with horror at their situation, for they had heard all and fully realized the fell purpose of the bandit leader, yet hoped that it was a threat, and not real intention on his part to carry out so fiendish a design of revenge because he had failed in getting the expected treasure.

Mute and motionless sat the two ladies upon the back seat, and in the center was the gentleman whom Buffalo Bill had referred to as a "tenderfoot," while in front was the stiffening form and ghastly face of the dead soldier, and which the Chinee seemed anxious to avoid touching, as he popped his head out of first one window and then the other, all the time chattering like a monkey.

"Now, Buffalo Bill, straight for the Breakneck Hill you go, and if these horses do not carry you down it at a speed that will smash this old hearse to atoms, and break their own necks, I'll give up the road-agency business and turn parson," said Bill Bevins, in a cold, heartless tone, and a look that told the joy he felt in his anticipated revenge.

"Again I ask you, Bill Bevins, to spare those in the coach, and visit upon me any revenge you like," and Buffalo Bill spoke in a low, earnest tone that proved he had no fear of death, but pleaded alone for those who had intrusted themselves to his care.

"Yes, killee scoutee, savee Chin Chin," cried the Chinee from the window, and he dodged back just in time to escape a blow aimed at him by one of the outlaws.

"No, Buffalo Bill, I send you your horses, the hearse and passengers to the devil together."

"Here, men, lead these animals to yonder fork of the road, and there turn them loose!"

The outlaws obeyed and with the first turn of the wheels there came moans of anguish from within the coach.

But Buffalo Bill was, though pale, stern, silent and fearless.

A hundred yards along the Overland trail, the road forked to the left, and long before had been used, until by caving and washing the hill had become utterly impassable.

An eighth of a mile beyond where it branched off, was the long and steep Breakneck Hill, and down this, where hardly four-footed beast could pick its way, the bandit leader intended the horses should be driven dragging the stage-coach after them.

"Now, Buffalo Bill, your life ends here," cried Bill Bevins, savagely.

"All right, old man, and the boys won't forget how I died," was the almost reckless response.

"Turn 'em loose!" shouted the bandit leader.

The men at the bits sprung aside, blows were given the leaders, to set them going, yells and shouts frightened them, and the splendid animals bounded away like the wind, the shrieks of those within the stage-coach drowned by the shouts of the cruel outlaws, the tramping of hoofs and the rattle of the lumbering wheels.

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL CUSTER TO THE FRONT.

A HORSEMAN was crossing a tract of prairie, and heading for a line of hills, rugged, rugged and wild that loomed up before him.

Though alone upon the prairie, afar back in his rear were visible other horsemen, urging their tired horses on with voice and spur upon his trail.

At first glance one might have thought it was a chase, the one in advance being pursued by the score of men in his rear; but a second look would have shown that it was the difference in human nature and horseflesh that caused a league of space to separate the leader and his comrades.

The rider was a man of fine physique, dressed in a cavalry fatigue suit, with pants stuck in the tops of handsome boots, a slouch hat, pinned up with a pair of crossed sabers of gold, and a gold cord encircling it, while upon the shoulders of his jacket were straps showing his rank to be that of a general officer in the United States army.

His face was a striking one, the features being clearly cut, daring to recklessness, and resolute to sternness, though there was a kindly look in the flashing eyes.

His hair and mustache were blonde in hue, and the former was waving, and fell upon his shoulders, thereby softening his expression somewhat.

He was armed with a gold-hilted cavalry sword and a pair of handsomely-mounted, serviceable revolvers, and wore gauntlet gloves.

His bridle and saddle were of the finest workmanship, and from a holster upon one side of the horn protruded the butt of a large navy six-shooter, while a lariat, neatly coiled, hung upon the other side.

The animal he bestrode was as impatient as his rider to get on, and that continued impatience had caused the officer to drop his escort far in the rear, urge their tired steeds as they might.

"It is a little risky to strike the hills alone; but I'll take the chances, and enjoy the view until the men come up.

"If I am attacked by Indians or road-agents I can but fight, or run for it," said the horseman, half-aloud, and peering cautiously ahead of him he let his horse strike the trail up into the hills, and had soon mounted to a commanding point.

As the foliage obstructed the view he turned short off to the left, and soon reached a spot where he could command the scene spread out before him.

The place where he halted seemed to have once been an old trail, but long since fallen into disuse, on account of the wash down the hill-side.

But it afforded him a grand view of the sloping hill, the prairie, with his escort coming toward him, and far beyond a green fringe of trees bordering a river.

Lost in contemplation of the landscape, he sat in silence upon his horse his eyes drinking in the beauties of Nature, when he was suddenly startled by loud yells and distant shots.

Instantly his reins were seized well in hand, and the large revolver drawn from the holster, while the horse was turned about as on a pivot, to face the danger, whatever it might be.

"Those were not Indian yells," he muttered, for, the thorough plainsman, he recognized the difference between a white man's shout and a red-skin's war-cry.

"Ha! I hear the sound of hoofs and wheels, and the shots and yells still continue."

So, saying, he bent his ear and listened, while his horse became excited as with the scent of danger.

Then the shots and sounds ceased, and yet the rapid clatter of hoofs was heard, and mingling with it the rumble and jar of swiftly-turning wheels.

It was evident that whatever made the sound was drawing nearer the spot where he stood, and he bent his piercing eyes through the timber.

"By heaven! it is the stage-coach!"

The cry broke from his lips in ringing tones, and immediately followed the words:

"And the team is running away, or—flying from some danger."

Intently he now gazed before him, as there dashed into sight six gray horses rushing along like antelopes, their heads erect, eyes flashing, nostrils extended, and every evidence that they were flying in wild alarm.

"Ha! they are running away, and their driver has lost his nerve!"

"They will dash to destruction down this hill, for they are mad and blind with terror."

Then raising his voice he shouted in trumpet tones:

"Put on your brake! Drag hard on your lines, man, or you are lost!"

And back in clarion notes came the startling answer:

"Ho! general! I have lost my grip!"

"See! I am bound hand and foot!"

"Buffalo Bill! by the gods of war!" shouted the horseman, recognizing the scout upon the

box, and seeing now, what had before escaped him, that he was indeed bound, and that the reins were loosely swinging, and fastened to the lantern.

At this discovery the gold spurs had sunk into the flanks of his splendid thoroughbred, that bounded forward like a rocket; but, as though some second sudden thought had flashed upon him, he reined the animal back with a force that brought him upon his haunches, and throwing forward the hand that held there volver, said grimly:

"Now, George Custer, prove your boasted deadly aim and nerve, and save yonder noble man from death!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE OATH.

ONE glance upon the horseman, whom the reader now knows to have been General George A. Custer, the ill-fated hero of the Big Horn, was sufficient to show that he possessed a nerve of iron.

His spirited horse had been reined back with a pull upon the severe bit that had tamed its impatience, and there was no excitement, no hurry in the movements of the rider.

His face was placid, but firm, his eyes alone showing the intense pressure upon him, and he glanced at his pistol, to see that all was right, with the air of one who knew that life and death hung upon it alone.

Straight toward him the maddened horses were coming with a terrific rush of speed, and had even the bound man on the box then been able to seize the reins, no human strength could have checked them in the space between them and Breakneck Hill.

Once they had gone over the brow of the hill, and death to them and all in the coach was certain.

Far back in the rear the keen eyes of General Custer detected a band of horsemen.

They wore no uniforms, were not in buckskin, were not Indians, and could but be, in that lonely spot, and under the circumstances, none other than the Bandits of the Overland, and they were evidently coming to witness the finale of their hellish work.

A glance showed General Custer that his own men were yet a mile away upon the prairie; but not an instant did he hesitate because he was alone.

He would first do what he could for the rescue of Buffalo Bill and those in the coach, for he saw the head of the poor Chinee thrust half out upon one side, and a hand, grasping a knife upon the other, cutting at the lariats in wild haste.

Perfectly calm was Buffalo Bill, though not a hundred yards now separated him from certain death, unless the gallant horseman in his front could save him.

All this had General Custer noted in almost a single glance, and from the time he had raised his revolver ready to fire, to the instant he was ready to press the trigger had been but a few seconds.

Nearer the horses bounded, and when they had come within easy range, the finger touched the trigger, and the flash and report followed.

With perfect presence of mind General Custer had made his calculations.

Did he kill one of the leaders it would throw the others upon him, and the stage would be hurled over and perhaps kill the bound scout upon the box.

Did he kill one of the wheel-horses he would become a drag to the others, yet still be borne along at a slackened speed until his mate could be brought down, when those in advance would have their career greatly retarded, if not checked altogether, and if not the latter another animal could be killed and that must end the suspense and danger to those in the stage.

With the crack of his first shot the off-wheeler dropped, the stage swayed forward, sideways and then was dragged on by the five horses remaining yet, at a slackened pace.

Still keeping his revolver at an aim, General Custer noted the result of his shot, and again touched the trigger.

With the second shot the other wheeler stumbled, staggered, half-fell, regained his feet, and just as General Custer was about to fire again, went down heavily.

Again the coach swayed badly; but the stout pole was kept up by the pressure of the draft of four horses upon it, and the heavy breast-chains and traces kept the two dead animals firmly attached to it, thus acting as a powerful drag upon the others and slackening their speed to a slow gallop.

Raising his pistol as though about to fire again General Custer seemed suddenly to change his mind and returning it to its holster, drove the spurs into his horse and darted forward.

Wheeling as he reached the leaders, he rode alongside of them, seized the reins, and dragged them back upon their haunches.

And not an instant too soon, for the brow of Breakneck Hill was not three lengths of the coach and team away.

But the horses were maddened with fright, and again sprung forward, and General Custer in vain drew on the reins with one hand, while with the other he held back his own excited animal.

"It is no use, general, you'll have to drop another," said Buffalo Bill, with the utmost coolness, though they were nearing the hill rapidly.

"I wished to save the brutes, Cody, but it can not be," was the equally calm rejoinder, and again the large "Navy-six" was drawn from its holster and one, two, shots followed almost together.

Down in their tracks went the middle team, and the shock and weight dragged the leaders upon their haunches, while the stage-coach rolled half on top of the slain animals and came to a sudden stand-still which sent those on the back seat into the arms of those in front.

There was a commingled shriek of joy and terror from the ladies, a wild yell from the Heathers, and all was still.

"Quick, general, as you are alone, you had better fly, for see, yonder come my foes," cried Buffalo Bill, glancing back at Bill Bevins and his band now coming forward at a rapid run.

But General Custer was no man to fly and leave a comrade in peril.

His escort was yet a long way off he knew, Buffalo Bill was bound beyond quick release, and those in the coach could not be gotten out in time to aid in beating back the bandits.

But his mind was made up what he should do, and with his hat in one hand and revolver in the other, he dashed directly toward the bandits, shouting in his thrilling battle tones:

"Follow me, men, and cut these devils down!"

There was a sudden reining in of steeds, and then came the cry:

"Ho, men! fly for your lives! It is Custer, and his troopers are upon us!"

It was Bill Bevins who spoke, and well he knew the "Blonde-haired Custer."

Away the bandits darted like the wind, after a rattling fire of revolvers that did no harm, and with a light laugh General Custer galloped back to the coach, where the two leaders, now thoroughly cowed, stood panting and trembling.

Springing upon the box by the side of Buffalo Bill, General Custer hastily cut his bonds, while he said:

"There, Cody, you are free, and as my escort will soon be along we can soon help these poor passengers out of their trouble."

Turning upon the box where he stood, Buffalo Bill grasped the hand of his gallant rescuer and said impressively:

"Yes, General, I am free, and I owe my life to you. When I forget this day, may Heaven forget me. I swear it!"

CHAPTER V.

OATH-BOUND TO CUSTER.

SEVERAL years have gone by since the scenes narrated in the foregoing chapters, and along the border, in the time thus passed, the rifle and revolver have sent forth their deadly bullets, the knife has met knife in the hand-to-hand struggle, the shrill war-cries of the Indians have been heard in valley, on hill and prairie, and red trails have been followed to the bitter end by pale-face and red-skin alike.

In these wild scenes upon the far frontier no two men have borne more conspicuous parts than General Custer and Buffalo Bill.

Their duties kept them apart, yet now and then they would meet upon the war-path, or in the bivouac, and then the one would ever recall that day when he had been saved from death by the hand of the other, and ever add:

"General, if you ever die in battle, I will avenge you."

That this was no idle pledge, let my reader come with me to the Big Horn's banks, where perished in battle a gallant band of heroes.

The wild war-cries of the red skins had died away, the defiant cheers of the "Gallant Three Hundred" troopers were no longer heard, the roar of battle had ceased, and only an appalling holocaust remained.

The Big Horn's crystal tide flowed murmuringly by, the birds sat songless in the tree-tops, the setting sun fell upon hillside and valley, and a deathlike repose rested upon all.

The budding wild flowers and tender grass of June had been trampled upon, crimson stains were here and there, and tiny red rivulets had found their way down the slopes.

Up the valley columns of blue smoke curled upward from smoldering camp-fires, here and there a deserted tepee was visible, a dog prowled about the desolate village, a mustang with a bullet-shattered leg stood motionless and dejected, and upon all rested a scene of dreariness that was pitiful.

But adown the valley from the deserted Indian village was a scene to appall the heart when the eye rested upon it.

Here, there, everywhere, in one huddled mass lay men and horses dead together.

Lately fallen in battle they certainly were, for hardly yet had the thirsty ground drank up

the crimson tide that had flowed from death-wounds given to man and beast alike.

Stern, white-faced men they were, half-stripped of their uniforms, robbed of their weapons after death, and lying amid their foes, hideously painted, savage Indians, whom their red comrades, in their flight from the fearful scene, had not borne off to burial, though they had found time to tear the dearly-prized scalp-lock from the heads of their pale-face enemies.

A trooper or two, a red-skin, an officer, a chief, a caparisoned steed, an Indian pony, all dead, they lay, here, there, everywhere, upon the hillsides, in the valley, near the river, until the whole scene for acres was thus strewn over, and the total sacrifice remained, showing how deadly had been the fray, how fearful the holocaust upon the very threshold of the Indian village.

And upon this sickening sight, where Death reigned supreme, where Custer and his gallant troopers still held the field, though slain, a horseman came, just as the sun touched the ridge of the distant hills.

He had been following a well-marked trail up the canyon, to suddenly have this scene of carnage burst upon him.

Alone, he was bearing dispatches from one general officer to another, that other whom his eye was soon to fall upon, but whose hand could never grasp his more in welcome.

So suddenly did the scene burst upon him, so unexpected the sight that met his gaze, that, man of iron heart and nerves of steel though he was, he fairly reeled in his saddle, and reining his horse back upon his haunches, with cruel drag upon the bit, he covered his face with his hands as though to shut out the appalling spectacle.

An instant only did the man show this weakness, and then his white face was turned upon the red field that had burst like some dream of Dante's *Inferno* upon his vision.

White faced as the dead before him, with eyes that fairly burned with the fire of rage, lips that were livid and quivering, and hands that trembled, he looked for one full minute upon what lay before him.

From the deserted Indian village in the distance, with its few tepees still remaining, he glanced to the trampled, dead-strewn hillsides, and then upon the valley where had been the thickest of the fight.

No movement of man or beast came, as he had hoped, to prove that life yet remained, that Death's icy touch had not stilled every pulse.

No, he felt, he knew, when he saw the scalpless heads of those that lay near him, that the red work had been complete.

He uttered no word, but, dismounting, took from off his head the broad sombrero he wore, and with respectful tread moved forward.

Slowly his horse followed in his tracks, his ears pricked up, his eyes flashing, and nostrils distended, as he invaded the sacred Valley of Death.

From dead to dead the horseman went, his eyes eagerly scanning every face.

Here and there he paused as a heap of slain proved how bitter had been the struggle just at that point.

Half up the hillside, then down in the valley, over near the banks of the stream, and steadily moving toward the Indian village he went, his horse following slowly and in trembling dread.

At last his eye fell upon a heap of slain just upon a slight knoll, and at the base of a low rock.

His gaze scanned the field quickly then, and he seemed to feel that there would be found the one he sought, for it was evident that in that spot the end had come, the last act of the fearful drama had been played, and that the curtain of doom had fallen upon the remnant of that gallant band, to rise no more for them in life.

Through the dead he picked his way, until seeing that they lay so thick his horse could not follow him without crushing them beneath his iron hoofs, he bade him halt, in a low, deep voice that fairly startled him with its strangeness.

The obedient animal stopped in his tracks, and tremblingly stood looking to the right and left as though he longed to fly from the dread scene.

And on strode his rider toward the heap of slain that had caught his eye, for there he seemed to feel Fate beckoned him.

Nearer and nearer he drew, stepping with reverence over the dead bodies about him, and looking down pitifully into the ghastly, upturned faces whose sightless eyes seemed to meet his own with a stony stare that longed to tell all they had seen ere death eclipsed them.

A few steps more and he reached the spot he had sought, and a groan issued from between his shut teeth, and he bowed his uncovered head with grief and reverence commingled.

There, resting in an attitude that showed he had sunk down fighting to the last, lay the blonde-haired chieftain, Custer.

His head was bared, and his light hair was flowing and blood-stained.

The left hand grasped the barrel of a revolver, which showed that its charges had been

emptied and that it had been clubbed to use at close quarters, while the right held his sword-hilt, and the blade was buried in the body of a painted chief, and was probably the last act of the dying leader of the three hundred slaughtered troopers.

About him lay the brave officers and men who had died with him, and their foes were piled in heaps around their last rallying point.

The one who stood gazing upon the scene of death, the red tracks left by cruel war, saw that Custer alone had been respected by his foes, for no knife had snatched from his proud head the scalp-lock, and even the savage braves that fought him to the death, had laid no impious touch upon him.

"Custer dead!"

The words broke from the lips of the one who stood above him, and the voice quivered as with deepest sorrow.

And then suddenly burst forth in ringing tones:

"Ay, dead, and slain by those who had vowed to take his life.

"Indian work this is, but back of it there is a pale-face hand, and I mean to ferret out this red deed and bring retribution on whom retribution should justly fall."

Like trumpet tones his words had rung out, the storm following the calm.

And then, springing forward, he dropped upon one knee, and raising his hand toward heaven, he said, in a voice that quivered with sorrow and passion:

"Yes, here upon this red field, in the presence of him whose death I once swore to avenge, I renew that vow and from this day hold myself as oath-bound to Custer!"

Having uttered his vow upon bended knee the man sprung suddenly to his feet, as there fell upon his ears a human voice, crying in threatening tones:

"And I swear, Buffalo Bill, that you shall never keep the oath your lips have just uttered!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE COVETED SCALP-LOCK.

THE words that broke upon the ears of Buffalo Bill, as he stood there surrounded by the dead, and believing himself alone the only living human being near, fell like a voice from the tomb, and for once the noted plainsman was momentarily unnerved.

But when his eyes fell upon the speaker, and saw that he had an old and deadly foe to deal with, and heard the threatening words, he instantly became himself again, and said, in a tone that was reckless in its indifference:

"Well, Bill Bevins, we meet again, and as before, you hold the trump card, for you have me covered, I see."

The man he addressed stood within five feet of him, and held a rifle covering his heart.

To all appearances he was an Indian chief, for he was so bedecked with feathers, and his face was hideously painted, while he wore the full attire of a red-skin, from moccasins to warbonnet.

At his back, with rifles and arrows covering the scout, were a score of braves, who had, with the stealthy tread of panthers, followed their leader to the spot where Buffalo Bill knelt over the body of Custer, and well did the scout know that he was at the mercy of his foes.

"You know me, then, Buffalo Bill?" asked the man, whose words had so startled him.

"Yes, even beneath your paint and feathers, I recognize the black heart of Bill Bevins," was the fearless reply of the scout.

"Have a care, Sir Scout, for every word of insult you heap upon me shall be a burning coal upon your head, when you come to die."

"Yes, when I come to die; but I am one who carries the belief about with me in my pocket, you accursed renegade, that while there is life there's hope."

"That belief will do you no good, now."

"Bah! a barking dog never bites," was the contemptuous reply.

The renegade looked as though he was about to shoot the scout in his tracks; but he caught sight of a smile upon his face, and, not understanding it, refrained, while he said:

"You must have help at hand, or you would not be thus defiant, Buffalo Bill."

"No, I am all alone, and he who once saved me from your vengeance lies stark and dead before you there."

"Look upon him, man! look upon these brave men who lie about him silent in death, and let your coward heart cringe, if heart you have, that you, a white man, should have aided the red-skins in this red, devilish work."

Buffalo Bill spoke impetuously, and his eyes flashed fire as he bent them upon the renegade, who did for a moment seem to cower at the words of the scout.

But the next instant, with a shrug of the shoulders, he said:

"Ay, I was white once, Bill Cody, and my own blood-kindred cast me adrift in the world—"

"Your own crimes," sneered Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, I did sin, and for it I was treated with no mercy, and that I might not die in prison I came to this boundless land."

"The world owed me a living and it gave me none, so I took to horse-stealing, and then to stage-robbing, and you made the overland trail so hot for me that I had to become a renegade.

"I swore to have revenge on you, and once that man, that corpse, saved you from my well-planned scheme to see you die, and I vowed that he, too, should feel the weight of my hatred."

"You have kept that vow, you accursed renegade," said Buffalo Bill, with savage earnestness.

"No, we recklessly attacked the Sioux in their village, and he and his soldiers were beaten back, overwhelmed and crushed."

"And not one left to tell the story, no prisoners taken?"

"Oh no! Sitting Bull wanted no prisoners from Custer's band, and all who charged in here with him are dead, and their scalps adorn the belts of many a gallant brave."

"And you fought with the Sioux?" asked the scout.

"Yes, and killed as they killed, without mercy."

"And you do not fear to admit it?"

"Why should I, for am I not speaking to one who will soon be dead?" was the sinister reply.

"It looks that way, I do not deny, Bill Bevins; but answer me one question.

"Did you kill General Custer?"

"I am sorry to say that I did not."

"You know who did kill him?"

"Yellow Hand claims that honor."

"The Cheyenne they call the Giant Chief?"

"Yes."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, but simply smiled, and the renegade asked:

"Would you know why I have returned here, when Sitting Bull and his warriors are in full flight?"

"Yes, why have you dared come back here among the sacred dead?"

"I will tell you.

"Sitting Bull refused to allow Red Knife, or any other chief, to take the scalp of Custer."

"God bless the old red sinner for that," fervently said Buffalo Bill.

"But I am Death Killer, the medicine chief, and I have come back myself to take the blonde scalp-lock from the head of the haughty man against whom I swore revenge."

"Bill Bevins, accursed though you be, with a heart blacker than the vilest red-skin can boast of, you will not do this wrong," cried Buffalo Bill, his voice trembling with emotion.

"You are mistaken, Cody," was the cool rejoinder.

"I called to a few of my braves to follow me, and rode back to take that scalp-lock."

"I saw you coming hither, and knew I could not be mistaken in your handsome face and elegant form, and leaving our ponies we dogged your steps, and you were too much cast down with grief to know your danger."

"See, I am here, and you are my prisoner, and when you have seen me tear the trophy from yonder head, then will I wring a cry for mercy from your stern lips, Buffalo Bill."

"Never! if this be my last act on earth!"

With his ringing words Buffalo Bill suddenly jerked a revolver from his belt, and throwing it forward, fired with the quickness of a flash.

CHAPTER VII.

FEATHER FEET.

So rapid and unexpected had been the movement of Buffalo Bill, in drawing his revolver and firing it, that not one of the warriors, who stood behind their renegade chief, some with arrows fitted to their bows, and others with rifles covering the heart of the scout, had time to fire.

And, not even Bill Bevins himself, who had his weapon pointed at Buffalo Bill, had an instant to touch the trigger before the act, flash and report came almost together.

Momentarily the arm was stunned by the severe blow of the arrow-head, which glanced on the bone, and fell to his side, the revolver dropping from his hand to the ground.

And yet, swift as had been the act of the scout, one eye had been quick enough to send an arrow upon its errand, and striking the outstretched arm of Buffalo Bill, just as his finger touched the trigger, it buried itself there and by the shock destroyed his unerring aim.

But, having made the daring move, and knowing that death must follow his deed, Buffalo Bill dropped his left hand upon his second revolver, determined to press the fighting and die as had the gallant man who lay at his feet.

Maddened with rage, and thirsting for the life of his foe, Bill Bevins shouted to his warriors to rush upon the scout and take him alive, that he might end his career by cruel torture.

But suddenly a slender form darted before the red braves, and with an arrow set in readiness to let fly, covered them, while there came in ringing tones, and in the Sioux tongue:

"Let the Sioux braves stand back!"

"The Feather Feet commands it!"

Like one man they halted and gazed upon the one who had so commanded them.

And Buffalo Bill too riveted his eyes upon the one who had sprung between him and certain death, though he knew full well that the arrow buried in his arm had been sent from the bow he now beheld bent upon his foes.

It was a woman that he saw, or rather a young girl, for she was scarcely over seventeen.

Her form was slender and graceful, and seemed weighted down with the bead and feather-wrought costume she wore, while her face bore the unmistakable stamp of having pale-face as well as Indian blood flowing in her veins.

Buffalo Bill's long life upon the prairies had made him a skeptic in regard to Indian beauty, and yet he could not but admit that the one before him possessed a face and form of rare loveliness.

Why she was there, he did not know, but there was one remarkable feature about her that told him who she was.

That was her hair, for though just budding into womanhood, it was as white as snow!

Long, luxuriant hair it was, yet every strand was of seeming silver, contrasting strangely with her complexion of bronze and eyes as black as ebony.

The scout had heard of such a being in the head village of the Sioux, and that she was looked upon as one sent especially by the Great Spirit, and was revered and feared by every Indian of the tribe, from the oldest medicine-man to the youngest papoose.

From this reason she was called the Sioux Queen, though her real name was Feather Feet.

As she was here on the red field the warriors of her tribe had made, Buffalo Bill feared that her people might be returning to lay an ambuscade for the force then marching to support Custer, and from which he had come with dispatches.

If such was the case he must make a desperate attempt to escape and warn them of danger, for, maddened by their victory and drunk with the blood they had caused to flow, the Sioux would prove far more formidable foes in another battle with the pale-faces.

While this thought was flashing through his mind the renegade spoke, addressing the maiden, who still held her threatening attitude:

"Why has the Feather Feet become the friend of the slayer of her people, for the man before her is *Pa-e-has-ka**, the Killer?"

"The arrow of the Feather Feet still sticks in the arm of the *Pa-e-has-ka*."

"Is that the way an Indian treats a friend?" asked the young girl, with scorn in look and tone.

"Then the Feather Feet yields the pale-face foe of her people to the medicine-chief of her tribe?"

"No!" was the decided response.

"What would the maiden do?" asked the renegade, with surprise.

"She would herself carry *Pa-e-has-ka* to her tribe."

"The Feather Feet is no warrior," sneered the renegade.

"She has just saved the life of the pale-face medicine-chief of her tribe," was the calm retort.

At this Buffalo Bill laughed lightly, for he saw that the shot went home, and his seeming indifference to his peril caused her to turn her eyes upon him.

The look was not a stare, it was more, and she scanned him from head to foot.

What was in her thoughts none could tell; but, as though having decided upon her course of action, she stepped boldly to the side of Buffalo Bill and drew the arrow out of his arm where it had passed partially through it.

The scout never winced at the pain, and baring the arm, she bound it up with a piece of soft buckskin, not a word being spoken the while, though the renegade and his braves watched her intently.

"Is not that act of the Feather Feet one of friendship for the pale-face?" asked the renegade, when she had dressed the wound as well as she was able to do under the circumstances.

The Indian girl made no reply to the renegade, but asked, addressing Buffalo Bill:

"Is the pale-face *Pa-e-has-ka*?"

"So the Indians call me," was the response.

"Why is he here?"

"I came to see the dead chief, there, my friend," answered Buffalo Bill, speaking in perfect Sioux, and pointing to the dead Custer, whose stern face looked almost life-like in the last glow of the setting sun which fell upon it.

"Where are the pale-face brothers of the *Pa-e-has-ka*?"

Buffalo Bill pointed in the direction from whence he had come, and said:

"Far away."

"The Feather Feet is his foe, and the foe of his people; but she wishes not to see the wolves and the vultures tear the brave pale-faces in pieces, and she will let the *Pa-e-has-ka* go to bring his warriors to bury them."

*The Indians call Buffalo Bill *Pa-e-has-ka* (Long Hair), also "The Killer."

"You've got the heart to do it, I believe, if you have the nerve to carry it out," said Buffalo Bill, bluntly, while the renegade cried, savagely:

"No, you shall not leave this spot alive, Bill Cody."

"We'll see who wears the breeches in this family, Bill Bevins," laughed Buffalo Bill, as though amused in spite of his peril, and turning to Feather Feet, he continued, in Sioux:

"Now it's your turn, my red-skin beauty."

Without noticing the remark of the renegade, the maiden continued:

"But the *Pa-e-has-ka* must make the Feather Feet a promise."

"I'll do it."

"The Feather Feet came from the great chief, Sitting Bull, who told her to seek the pale-face warriors down the valley and tell them where to find their dead braves.

"He bids them remain here and bury their dead, and not follow on the trail of his people, who go far to the north."

"Will the *Pa-e-has-ka* tell his chiefs the words of the Sitting Bull?"

"I will."

"And will he then come back and be a captive of the Sitting Bull?"

She looked him straight in the eye as she asked the question, and Buffalo Bill saw that she meant just what she said; but he asked:

"Does the Feather Feet mean that I am to return to her people after I have guided the soldiers here to see the work of her people?"

"The Feather Feet has spoken."

"And this is the promise she wishes *Pa-e-has-ka* to make her?"

The Indian girl nodded.

"Why should he return?"

"He is the captive of the medicine chief now, but Feather Feet lets him go free that his pale-face braves may not lie here unburied, and that the other warriors of his people may take warning not to follow upon the trail of the Sitting Bull."

"Will he promise to do this, and then come to the village of the Sioux?"

Buffalo Bill was silent an instant.

If he refused, he knew that she would not protect him from the renegade.

If he promised, he would keep that promise, be the end what it might.

But the promise bade fair to help him out of the present difficulty, and he would make it.

But he made a mental reservation, too, and that was that after bearing the tidings to the supporting column, and delivering Sitting Bull's warning, he would go on to the Indian village, but with a force at his back that would surprise the red-skins.

"I promise the Feather Feet," he said.

"He'll not keep his pledge," cried the renegade.

"The *Pa-e-has-ka* is the foe of my people, but his tongue is straight," said the maiden.

"But he will come with a force at his back that will burn the Sioux villages and kill the Feather Feet and her people."

Buffalo Bill saw the girl start at this, and gave the renegade credit for having divined his purpose.

"If the *Pa-e-has-ka* will do this, he must remain now a captive to the medicine-chief," she said, in an injured tone.

"Don't believe that old liar, Feather Feet, for the *Pa-e-has-ka* will come alone," answered Buffalo Bill.

"The Feather Feet will believe him."

"He is a great scout and can find the trail of the Sitting Bull."

"Now let him go."

"By heaven! Buffalo Bill, you leave not this spot alive," cried Bill Bevins, savagely, and he again covered the scout with his rifle.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN'S POWER.

THE scene that followed the words and act of the renegade formed a striking tableau, and a most thrilling one.

The moment that Bill Bevins gave utterance to the threat, Buffalo Bill had placed himself upon his guard by instantly drawing his revolvers, and held one covering the renegade, for he had replaced them in his belt during his conversation with Feather Feet.

His arm had recovered from the shock of the arrow blow, and he had good use of it, though it pained him severely.

At the same instant Feather Feet had also covered the renegade with her bow and arrow, and aimed straight at his heart, while the warrior band, which had been silent through all, and had stood like statues, at the action of their chief and Buffalo Bill, at once brought their rifles and arrows to an aim upon the latter.

Thus they stood amid the dead soldiers and Sioux, a fearful tableau, which a movement of any one might precipitate into a deadly encounter.

Buffalo Bill, though pale, was stern and determined, and though he could see the act of the Indian girl was friendly to him, he kept his eyes riveted upon the renegade.

For an instant, which seemed a long, long time to the participants, this threatening attitude lasted, and then the scout broke the silence with the sneering words:

"Why do you not bring that finger to the trigger of your rifle, Bill Bevins, for it won't go off otherwise?"

Feather Feet understood English, and seeing that the scout dared the renegade to move, she said quickly:

"The Feather Feet tells the braves of her tribe to turn their arrows and rifles from the heart of the Killer."

The command came from the lips of the Indian girl in a tone that was firm, and as though she expected instant obedience, and, to the surprise and delight of Buffalo Bill, it was at once obeyed.

That Bill Bevins, the renegade, had expected as much was evident from his manner, for he made no effort to resist the will of Feather Feet, fully recognizing the uselessness of so doing, for, though the warriors belonged to his own band, as medicine-chief, yet he knew the power of the young girl, believed to be by the red-skins a child of the Great Spirit, was greater than any one else even to the authority of Sitting Bull.

"Red-skins you are trumps, and the girl holds a full hand of you, and plays you well," said Buffalo Bill, with one of his light laughs that were apparently reckless of consequences.

"The laugh is yours now, Buffalo Bill, but my time will yet come," hissed the renegade.

"Oh! I can't expect to laugh always, Bill Bevins; but," and the scout spoke once more in the Sioux tongue, so that the braves could understand him:

"Let the renegade pale-face meet me now in personal combat, and then his revenge, or mine, can be satiated right here."

The look upon the faces of the warriors proved that this was a proposition that tickled them, and they said a few words together in a low tone, and looked toward their chief for a reply.

As for the renegade it did not strike him favorably, if his face was an index of what he thought; but he was no coward, vile as he was, and dared not refuse to face the scout, did he wish to hold influence with the Indians.

Though confident of his own strength and prowess, however, he yet knew too much of Buffalo Bill to care to meet him with either revolver or knife.

But the challenge had been hurled in his teeth, and live or die he must accept the alternative, and he said grimly:

"The red-skin slayer has spoken well."

"We will fight."

"The Feather Feet says no," and the Indian girl faced the renegade.

What her motive in so doing Buffalo Bill could not understand any more than could the renegade.

They had not met before, he held no claim upon her that he was aware of, and there was certainly no sentiment in the matter.

But she had negated the duel in a tone that showed she meant it.

This very refusal of Feather Feet caused the renegade to urge it on, while Buffalo Bill remained silent.

"No, the Feather Feet says the Death Killer and *Pa-e-has-ka* shall not fight," she repeated.

"The Death Killer will give the Feather Feet the scalp of her foe to carry to her people," urged the renegade.

"The white hunter would carry the scalp of the medicine-chief at his belt," was the significant reply, and Buffalo Bill said banteringly:

"That's just what I would do, Bill Bevins, and I tell you also, though Feather Feet prevents our meeting now, I'll be on your trail like a wolf, and yet nail your scalp on my cabin-door, as a warning to horse-thieves, stage-robbers and renegades."

The last words were spoken earnestly, and Feather Feet saw that they hit hard, so said quickly:

"Let the Killer go to his chief and his braves."

"His horse is there," and she pointed to the well-trained animal waiting near.

"I will do as the Feather Feet says, for there seems no chance of a fight here; but will the red-skin girl let this white wretch take the scalp of my brother there?"

He pointed to the body of Custer as he spoke.

"No; the medicine-chief will return on the trail with the Feather Feet."

"And his braves?"

"His warriors will go too."

"If it's just the same, Miss Feather Feet, suppose you all light out now, and I will then start to my people, for I can see that that accursed renegade itches to secure a trophy that even Sitting Bull would not allow his warriors to touch."

"The white hunter has told the Feather Feet that he will come to the village of the Sitting Bull?"

"Yes; when I have guided my chief and his warriors here."

"*Pa-e-has-ka*'s tongue is straight?" she asked.

"Not a crook or a curl in it," was the smiling response.

"The Feather Feet will trust him.

"Let the medicine-chief and his braves come with the Feather Feet."

The renegade muttered an oath and a threat, and then followed the Indian girl, his warriors stalking slowly after him.

Buffalo Bill watched them until they disappeared in the gloom of the gathering night, and then muttered:

"Though dead, gallant Custer, you still hold the field."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAD HERCULES.

In a lovely valley through which wound a small stream flowing into the Yellowstone, a cavalry command was encamped, a few days after the battle of the Big Horn where Custer and his men fell to rise no more.

It was not yet sunset, but the troopers had ridden hard, and the order to encamp had been given at an early hour, when the command came upon a lovely spot for a bivouac, and the guide reported that the ridge before them afforded no good camping-ground.

The horses were soon lariated out, and scores of camp-fires were kindled along the banks of the stream, while the soldiers began to prepare for the coming night as best they could.

Leaving his servant to prepare his frugal supper, the leader of the soldier band strode up the hillside toward the summit of the ridge, as though to get a better view of the country about, while daylight yet remained.

"Be careful, general, for I hain't scouted ahead, an' I looks ter jump Injuns hereabout at any time," called out the guide, a weather-beaten, buckskin-clad old son of the prairies.

"All right, Frank, I'll call if I run upon any red-skins," answered the fearless officer, and he strode on alone up the hill.

Once or twice he turned to enjoy the scene of beauty laid out before him, with the lovely valley and the picturesque bivouac, and at last, just as the sun touched the top summit of a distant and lofty range of hills, he reached a point from whence he could behold the country over which the morrow's trail would lead him.

Below him all was shadow, for the sun had set to those in the valley; but the hill-tops were bathed in golden light, and unconsciously speaking aloud, he said:

"No wonder that the poor red-skins love this land so well that they fight for every foot of it, as the march of civilization drives them before it."

"It seems that one could dwell here at peace with man and God."

"Well said, sir officer! but I've got the drop on you."

The general started as the voice broke upon his ears, and dropping his hand upon his sword-hilt turned to face the speaker.

Before him, and not six paces distant, having but just stepped out from a dense thicket, he beheld what at first appeared to be hardly human.

And yet none other was near, and from the lips of the one upon whom his eyes rested had fallen the words that had told him he was not alone.

"Who or what are you?" asked the officer, sternly, his eyes fixed upon the intruder, and beholding a man of giant size, clad in the skins of wild beasts, that had at first caused him to appear like a huge grizzly bear reared upon his hind legs for an attack upon his foe.

About his waist was a red foxskin belt, in which were two revolvers and a large knife, upon his head was a panther-skin cap, the tail hanging down the back, and upon his feet were moccasins of black bearskin.

Hair black as night, falling to his waist, beard of the same hue, matted and unkempt, and a revolver held in his left hand and covering the officer, made up the general appearance of the being that had so unexpectedly broken the reverie of the general.

A glance had shown the officer just what I have described, and it also was sufficient to see a dark, haggard face, with eyes of strange blackness and brightness gazing straight into his own.

In hoarse, deep tones the strange being said, while he still held his revolver at a level, and in a hand that had not the slightest tremor:

"You ask who or what I am?"

"Yes," and the general watched him with the eye of a hawk, hoping for some chance to draw a revolver, which would place him on more equal terms with his giant adversary, for such he felt assured he would prove.

"A madman!"

The answer was fairly shouted from out the bearded lips, but the man's attitude did not change in the slightest.

In spite of himself the general started at the savage response, but said, in a kindly tone:

"My poor man, put up your weapon and go with me to my camp, and I will care for you."

"Never!" was the savage reply.

"But, my dear fellow—"

"Hold! address no words of kindness to me, for they are thrown away upon one whose duty it is to kill."

"Hast ever heard of the Mad Hercules?"

"Ha! I have heard of such a character, reported as dwelling on the Yellowstone."

"I am the Mad Hercules, and if you know of me, you will understand that my mission is to kill, and mercy I show to none, not even one who wears the epaulettes of high rank as you do."

"No, no, I spare neither my own race, for I am a white man, or was, before I became as a wild beast, and red-skin, too, is my foe."

"All are alike to me."

The man spoke with intensity in tone, though not a muscle moved, and the iron hand still held the revolver at a level, covering the officer's heart.

"But how have I harmed you, my poor man?"

"You are human, and all mankind are my foes," was the trembling response, and then he cried out, in a louder tone:

"Come, the night draws near, and I have yet to run down my game for my supper."

"Come! if you know prayers, say them, and when the sun sinks wholly behind those hills, I drop you dead in your tracks."

The officer saw that the madman was a giant in strength, as well as size, and many strange stories of the Mad Hercules of the Yellowstone had been told around the camp-fires of his immense power and deadly aim.

To cope with him he knew would be impossible, and a movement toward drawing his revolver, with which he was armed, would be the signal for his death.

In full view below him was the bivouac of his men, the camp-fires burning brightly in the gathering gloom; but to call for aid would precipitate the end, and he waited in silence, hoping some freak of the madman's humor might save him.

If the Mad Hercules kept his word, he knew he had not more than a minute to live, and to see how near the sun was to disappearing behind the hills, he turned his eyes in that direction.

Instantly his face flushed, and with hope, for his gaze fell upon the form of a horse and rider.

They were a long way off, and upon the spur of a hill, and just where the sunlight fell upon them, revealing both distinctly.

The horseman had been evidently about to descend to the valley, when his eyes fell upon the scene upon the opposite hill, and though the madman and his intended victim were fully six hundred yards away, he seemed to understand at a glance what was taking place, and instantly he drew rein, just as he was recognized by the officer who unconsciously allowed his name to break from his lips in a quick, hopeful whisper:

"Buffalo Bill!"

The keen ear of the Mad Hercules caught the name, and turning like a tiger at bay, his gaze fell upon the scout on the distant spur.

Quick as a flash, as he turned the general had dropped his hand upon his revolver and jerked it from his belt.

Throwing it forward he drew trigger, and the hammer fell with a click upon the nipple, no report following.

But the sound caused the madman to turn upon him once more, and the officer saw him bound upon him, throwing aside his pistol as he did so, and drawing his knife in his wild passion to kill.

But, even in that awful moment the officer's eyes turned upon the distant spur, and he beheld the rifle rise to the horseman's shoulder, and knew that, desperate as were the chances, Buffalo Bill intended risking a shot to save him.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHOT AT LONG RANGE.

In moments of deadly peril our thoughts fly quickest, and in an instant almost, when death stares us in the face, and seems inevitable, we think almost volumes.

So it was with the general officer in the moment of his deadly danger, when the Mad Hercules was rushing upon him with uplifted knife, as though that alone could aid him in satiating his revenge upon his foe, the pistol and bullet being far too tame as the means of gratifying the passion for hatred he seemed to feel against all mankind.

In that instant, after the hammer of his revolver fell without causing an explosion, the general remembered that only that morning he had cleaned his weapons thoroughly, and not having the cartridges near him just then, had slipped them into his belt, intending to load them as he rode along on the march.

Had he not forgotten so to do, brave and nervy man that he was, added to the fact that he was a dead shot, he could have killed the Mad Hercules, once he got his weapon leveled upon him.

Realizing the uselessness of his revolvers, he at once whipped out his sword to meet the ferocious attack, though with little hope of contesting against the madman with any degree of success.

He had recognized in the horseman, as his horse stood on the spur, when the last glimmer of sunlight rested upon him, one whom he knew as the King of Bordermen, Buffalo Bill.

He saw too in that moment of peril that Buffalo Bill had caught sight of the scene upon the ridge, when the Mad Hercules, clothed in the

skins of wild beasts, was springing upon him, in uniform, and the sun's setting rays revealed the difference between the two distinctly.

The one look of the general, as he stood on guard to meet the attack, though he could but know how it must end, showed to him that Buffalo Bill had suddenly thrown his rifle to his shoulder, and that the muzzle pointed toward them.

Fearful indeed were the chances against him; but Buffalo Bill was the man to take just such risks.

And he did take them. Just as the blade of the madman was poised above the head of the daring officer, whose nerve did not fail him, there came the puff of smoke from the scout's rifle and the general sprung aside to avoid the shock of the giant's fall, for down upon his face he fell heavily, burying his knife deep in the earth, and with a red streak across the top of the head where the bullet had cut its way.

"Bravo, brave Buffalo Bill! I owe you my life, and Heaven knows I never fought at closer quarters with death," said the officer, as he gazed an instant upon the huge, fallen form, and then turning toward the spur, where he had last seen the scout, he took off his hat and waved it thrice around his head, while he gave a ringing shout.

But the spur was already vacated, and up from the shadows came a ringing, answering cry, while he could see the horse and rider making for the valley.

His shout remained unnoticed in the bivouac of his men, doubtless drowned by the noise of the camp; but the clatter of the hoofs of the scout's horse came distinctly to his ears, and soon after he beheld the animal mounting the hillside toward him, and his daring rider urging him on.

With rapid bounds he came from the shadows below into the glimmering twilight above, and, drawing rein, the scout threw himself from his horse and confronted the officer.

"Cody, God bless you!"

"General Carr, as I live!"

Such were the words that came from the lips of the two men as their hands were clasped in warm and friendly greeting.

"Always in the right place, just when you are wanted, Bill," said the general.

"I came pretty near being in the wrong place, general, for that was a long way off to take the chances, as I feared I might kill you; but it looks like the 'Great American What-is-it,' that I have knocked over," and Buffalo Bill turned to the prostrate form of the madman, while General Carr said:

"It is the poor creature they call the Mad Hercules, and whose existence I half believed was only in the imaginations of old trappers, until to-day, Cody."

"I have heard of him, general, and they say he was a cruel demon; but I guess his evil works have ended."

"Now, sir, I have sad, sad news to make known to you, and I was seeking the command nearest to the Big Horn, when I saw you, and as I at first believed, a grizzly bear."

"It was worse, Cody; but what news have you?"

"Quick! tell me, has that Indian General, Sitting Bull, caught Merritt, Gibbon, or the dashing Custer in a trap?" said General Carr, anxiously.

"You have said it, general, for the gallant Custer and three hundred of the Seventh have been slain."

"Great God!" and the brave and noble-hearted Carr, who never flinched under the fiercest fire and deadliest danger, fairly staggered under the blow, while his voice trembled as he asked:

"Can this be true, Cody?"

"I saw Custer and his men dead on the field, general," was the sad reply.

"Then there can be no doubt; but when and where?"

"Upon the Big Horn, sir, where General Custer found the villages of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, and boldly attacked them."

"They were surrounded and overwhelmed by thousands of warriors, but fought to the end with desperate courage as every trace shows."

"And Benteen and Reno?"

"I know nothing, sir, and suppose they were not in the fight, or had gone off on other trails."

"I came upon the field about sunset, and left it an hour after, to try and find you, General Gibbon, or General Crook, and make known the fearful tidings, and at the same time deliver the warning of Sitting Bull to those who follow on his trail."

"Ha! did you see that wily old chief?"

"No, general; but one who represented him," and Buffalo Bill went on to tell the strange story of his visit to the fatal field and all that had occurred to him, while the two descended to the valley together, the scout's horse slowly following, and the Mad Hercules, seemingly forgotten, left lying where he had fallen.

CHAPTER XI.

GONE!

HALF a score of red-faced men were congregated in the tent of General Carr, listening to the story of Buffalo Bill of how he had found

the red field of the Big Horn, and Custer and his troopers.

Orders had been given for the men to turn in early, for a start for the scene of the fateful battle would be made before dawn; but, for once unheeding discipline, the soldiers sat around the camp-fires talking in low, earnest tones of the fearful tidings brought by the scout, and many a suppressed oath of vengeance was made by those who knew the gallant dead.

The officers in the general's tent had breathlessly listened to the scout's story of his having sought Custer with dispatches, followed his trail to the field, and what had suddenly burst upon his amazed and horrified vision.

The scene there with the renegade, Bill Bevins, and his warriors, the saving of his life by Feather Feet, who wounded him with an arrow to do so—for, had he killed the white medicine-chief his death would have followed—and, at last, his pledge to deliver himself up to Sitting Bull were all made known.

"But you certainly do not intend to keep your pledge, Cody?" said General Carr, noticing the earnest manner of the scout.

"I certainly do intend to keep it, general," was the low reply.

At this every officer was upon his feet, gazing at the scout in amazement, and real indignation, that he should think of keeping a promise so made.

"By the gods of war! but they'll burn you at the stake, Bill!" cried a young officer.

"Why, you, of all men, Cody, the Sioux and Cheyennes are anxious to get into their power," cried another.

"I know that they are anxious to make my more intimate acquaintance, gentlemen, and I intend to give them the chance," was the calm reply of Buffalo Bill.

"Never, Cody!"

"But, general, I—"

"I will hear no buts, Cody, for if you persist in your foolish intention of keeping your word, made to an Indian girl and a renegade, I will put you under arrest until after old Sitting Bull and his warriors are defeated and brought to terms," said General Carr, with considerable warmth.

"I'm afraid I'll grow gray in the guard-house, then, general, for Sitting Bull has already retreated, and it will take a large army to bring him and his warriors to terms, especially after their victory over Custer."

"Well, in that I agree with you; but that does not alter the question that I forbid you to return to the red-skins' camp, because you were forced to make a promise to save your life."

"I must remain firm in my determination, general, for if I take big chances in going to Sitting Bull's camp, I also hope to accomplish a purpose I have in my mind."

The general and his officers all saw that the scout was determined in his purpose, and had some ulterior object in view which he cared not to make known to them; but General Carr said:

"Cody, I owe to you my life, and in the past, services I can never repay, and if, even by the harshest means, I can keep you from making a fool of yourself and losing your life I intend to do so."

"Every man on this border who is your foe, knows what Buffalo Bill's Grip is, and I intend that you shall know what the grip of a friend is."

Buffalo Bill laughed lightly, and before he could reply a sergeant entered and saluted.

"Well, sergeant?" asked the general.

"He is not there, sir."

"Who is not there, sergeant?"

"The madman, sir."

"Ha! I remember, you went in the place of Murphy, to bring the body of the madman into camp?"

"Yes, sir," answered the sergeant.

"And you say the body was not there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you go up to the top of the ridge?"

"Yes, sir, and along the top of it on each side of where the trail led."

"And searched thoroughly?"

"I did, sir, and so did the eight men I had with me."

"This is strange, Cody, for you certainly killed the madman," and the general turned to the scout, who responded:

"I shot to kill him, general, and aimed at his head; but he may be as much like a grizzly as he looks, and hard to slay."

"I will go up on the ridge with the sergeant, and see if he found the right spot."

"Do so, Cody, if you are not too much fatigued, for I confess that I would prefer that mad giant should rather be dead than alive."

Buffalo Bill left the tent, and accompanied by the sergeant and his squad went toward the hills, leaving the general and his officers still discussing the sad tidings they had heard of the battle of the Big Horn.

In half an hour the sergeant returned, and alone.

"Where is the scout, sergeant?" asked the general, quickly.

"He left us upon the ridge, sir."

"Left you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where did he go?" and the general seemed anxiously to await the reply.

"We did not find the madman, sir, or any trace of him, and Mr. Cody sent one of my men to camp after his horse, and rode away, telling me to say to you, sir, that he would try and see if he couldn't get his grip upon the Mad Hercules, or Sitting Bull, before he saw you again."

"By the gods of war, he has gone!" cried the general in a tone of real distress, for he feared that Buffalo Bill, to keep his word to Feather Feet, had rashly gone to his death.

CHAPTER XII.

TRAILING A MADMAN.

THAT Buffalo Bill was intensely surprised, upon reaching the spot where he knew the Mad Hercules to have fallen, to find him gone, there is no doubt.

The aim he had taken had been a quick one, the distance very great, and he had barely time to see a huge being, clothed in hair, rushing, knife in hand, upon one whose uniform proved him to be an officer of high rank.

He saw how bravely that officer faced his foe, sword in hand, and he raised his rifle and sent his bullet upon its unerring way.

Arriving at the spot afterward he had not for a moment doubted that his aim was fatal, for a glance had shown him the huge head marked with a red stain, and the tidings of which he was the bearer had sunk the madman in their importance and horror, and only upon arriving at the bivouac had General Carr sent back after the body.

Buffalo Bill knew there was no mistaking the spot where the Mad Hercules had fallen, and yet he was not there.

In some unaccountable way he had disappeared. Had he friends near who had seen the encounter, and then borne him off?

After a moment's thought he felt that this could not be, for he remembered that in all the stories he had heard of the Mad Hercules, it was never said that he had a companion, and that he made war upon all human beings alike.

At any rate, being out of the encampment, and confident that General Carr would prevent his leaving the command to keep his word to Feather Feet, Buffalo Bill determined to remain away, and, as the sergeant reported, sent for his horse.

Riding away in the darkness he did not go very far, but went into a lonely camp for the night, and in full view of the camp-fires of the soldiers.

Knowing that the general would leave before dawn, and push on his way to the Big Horn with all rapidity, he did not fear being discovered in the darkness, and after looking to the comfort of his horse, rolled himself in his blanket and lay down to seek slumber.

He was awakened by the moving of the command over the ridge; but remaining quiet, as it was yet dark, he sunk to sleep again, and never awoke until the rising sun sent its rays into his face.

The scout was a man who always traveled well provided with provisions, and his breakfast was by no means a light repast, while he ate it with a will that showed perfect digestive organs, and that he had the strength to demand a generous meal.

Then saddling his horse, he mounted and rode along the ridge to where the military command had crossed.

The last stragglers had been for some time out of sight, having disappeared in the recesses of the distant range of hills, and Buffalo Bill then set to work to solve the mysterious disappearance of the Mad Hercules.

Thorough plainsman as he is, it did not take him long to discover that his shot had not been fatal, and that the madman had left of his own accord.

How seriously he was wounded he could not tell, so followed the large-footed trail along the ridge, then down into the valley, across it, and up the range of hills upon the other side.

As something about the trail seemed to strike him, Buffalo Bill suddenly hastened on, and reaching a high elevation took a survey of the scene below him.

The trail which General Carr's command was following, led down into a valley beyond, and alongside of a steep bluff at its base, and this they were just passing when the scout arrived at his point of observation.

The course he had taken, in following the madman's trail, had been one a bold rider only dare follow, and it had brought him out at a point ahead of the marching soldiers.

But it was not upon them, as they went by at the base of the range of hills, that his eyes rested after the first glance, but upon the tall form of the Mad Hercules.

In an instant Buffalo Bill divined his object.

Thwarted in his revenge the night before, he had seen the trail the troopers had taken, and, acquainted with the locality, knew that they must pass under the bluff, and thence he had gone to head them off.

So intent was he at his work when Buffalo

Bill stepped upon the hill above him that he did not see him.

And that work?

He was gathering huge rocks and piling them upon the edge of the cliff, beneath which the head of the column soon must pass.

His intention was evident, for several hundred feet below him, and immediately beneath, the trail led, and the maddened being meant murder in its vilest shape.

At first the scout intended to hail the column and warn them of their danger; but, with a second glance at the madman he changed his purpose, threw the rein of his horse over a limb, and leaving his rifle hanging to his saddle, stepped noiselessly over the top of the hill, and descended slowly toward the huge being at his ruthless work.

With a shot from his revolver Buffalo Bill knew that he could drop him dead; but he was no man to take such an advantage even against one who was said to possess the strength of a Samson.

With a step rendered light and noiseless by following many a deadly trail, the scout descended the hillside, keeping in the shelter of the scattering trees, until he stood within twenty feet of the Mad Hercules.

That strange and dread being had completed his task, of procuring a magazine of heavy rocks, and having made them into a huge pile, stood gazing down upon the coming soldiers, wholly unmindful that there was one gazing upon him, and only a few paces away, who had so nearly ended his days of madness the evening before.

And, Buffalo Bill as he gazed upon the wild creature saw that his eyes were as fierce as a wolf's in their flash, that his hands opened and shut with nervous clutches, and his body was bent forward with eager expectancy of satisfying his hate by a cruel revenge upon his fellow-men.

Also, the scout saw that his long hair, which hung down beneath his huge skin cap, was matted and stained with blood, from the wound where his bullet had cut its way.

Nearer and nearer drew the column of soldiers, until the advance reached the bluff and passed from sight beneath it.

But still the madman made no hostile demonstration.

His eye was upon the general and his staff, who came riding along after the first regiment.

Through a gap in the bluff Buffalo Bill saw that the general and those about him were to be the objects of the Mad Hercules's attention, and he stood ready to act.

As the general rode from sight, upon the trail winding directly under the precipitous hillside, the madman carefully selected a huge stone, and raising it above his head was picking out his victim, and biding his time to throw it, when Buffalo Bill bounded from his place of concealment, and, with a revolver in one hand, with the other lightly touched the giant upon the shoulder with the quiet remark:

"Say, Shanghai pard, drop that tombstone and tackle me, if you are pining to kill somebody!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STRUGGLE ON THE CLIFF.

WHEN Buffalo Bill addressed the Mad Hercules, in his calm, bantering way, he had nerved himself for the consequences.

The man's gigantic frame, rendered larger by his hairy attire and high wolf-skin cap, his savage, bearded face, with eyes that glared rather than shone, his matted hair and beard, and belt of arms, made him a foe that few men would have dared to face.

Buffalo Bill could have dropped him in his tracks as he stood, but there was too much manliness in his nature to take such an advantage, although he knew he had little more than a wild beast in ferocity to deal with.

The madness of the man he pitied, and he determined to see if he could not cow him into submission, though he knew the chances were against doing so.

He was wholly upon his guard, therefore, when he laid his hand upon the arm of the Mad Hercules, and addressed him as he did.

The madman shrank back as though an adder had stung him, at the same time uttering a wild cry of apparent terror.

Still he did not lower his upraised hands, nor drop the huge stone they held.

Trembling violently he gazed upon the scout, who kept him covered with his revolver, and as the fierce expression in his eyes changed to a look Buffalo Bill, who watched him like a hawk, could not fathom, he began to back slowly from before the man who had so boldly confronted him.

His wild yell had been heard by the marching soldiers below, a shout had been the answer, and the column had halted and stood gazing, as though spell bound with horror, upon the scene far up upon the bluff.

This Buffalo Bill saw in one quick glance, and he seemed to feel that the madman was backing off so that he could get fair space to hurl the stone at him.

"Drop that tombstone, old Blue Beard!"

The order was given in a stern, threatening tone, in spite of the light words, and Buffalo Bill held the eye of the madman as he spoke.

Instantly the heavy stone fell with a crash to the earth, and the madman's hands fell to his side, passing the butts of his pistols with no effort to grasp them.

"Why this is a picnic, when I expected to tackle a cyclone," said the scout, in his off-hand way, and still covering the Mad Hercules he was about to advance upon him, when a ringing cry came from the plain below:

"Hold, Cody! for God's sake hold!"

Buffalo Bill glanced quickly downward, and beheld General Carr seated upon his horse below, and with hundreds of others gazing up at him.

But he uttered no word in reply, and again nerve himself to advance upon the madman.

As for the strange being he seemed not to have heard the general's cry, but stood trembling, and gazing upon the scout, while his jaws moved as though he was gritting his teeth with rage.

Seeing Buffalo Bill again about to advance, as though to try his strength with the madman, for he had lowered his weapon, General Carr shouted:

"Hold, Cody! for here comes my guide, Frank Gourard, who can drop him where he stands."

But Buffalo Bill heeded not the command, and at once stepped boldly toward the madman.

As he did so the strange being gave a cry of seeming fright, shrank backward, waved his hands, as though to ward the scout off, and then, with the bound of a deer had started away in a wild run.

Buffalo Bill was amazed, and half-raised his revolver, as though to check his flight; but thinking better of it on the instant, returned the weapon to his belt with the remark:

"Poor, mad wretch, let him go."

Beholding the flight of the Mad Hercules, where they had expected to see him spring upon the scout, the soldiers broke forth in one long, wild cheer, and up the hillside floated the ringing words from the lips of General Carr:

"Bravo for you, Buffalo Bill!"

The scout raised his hat in response and turned away, and though the command waited for some time, as though expecting to have him join it, he did not come.

Then Frank Gourard went up to the summit of the hill, and soon after returned to report to General Carr.

"Ther Mad Herckiles had a pile o' stuns up ther ter sling onter us, gin'r'al, an' Bill doubtless tackled him afore he c'u'd open fire, an' saved their brainpans o' some o' us from gittin' smashed in."

"But did you see nothing of the madman, or of Buffalo Bill either?"

"No, general; they had both levanted."

"But where had they gone?" persisted the general.

"Ther trails showed that ther Mad Herckiles hed dug cut fer all he was wuth, an' ther Buffalo Bill were hot on his tracks."

"Then Buffalo Bill has again gone in chase of the madman, Frank?"

"Thet's jist ther identical size o' it, gin'r'al—Holy smoke! look a thar!"

The exclamation of the guide, followed by his words in a loud voice, caused every eye to glance upward, for his gaze was fixed upon the top of the bluff, which they had passed beneath only a few moments before.

There was no reason for any one to ask what had caused the cry, for there in plain view of all, were visible two human forms engaged in a death-struggle upon the very verge of the precipice, and each one striving to hurl the other from the lofty height.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE FIRST SCALP FOR CUSTER."

The scene upon the cliff, and upon which the eyes of the soldiers were riveted, was a most thrilling one.

Especially was it so to those who gazed upon it, as one of the men struggling for life and death was Buffalo Bill.

At first all had believed that it was none other than the Mad Hercules, who had turned upon his trailer to join battle with him.

But a closer look proved that it was other than the madman.

The fact is that Buffalo Bill, as Frank Gourard had said, had gone on the trail of the madman.

At first he had determined to let him go, as he seemed to fly from him in terror; but when he glanced at the pile of stones he had intended to hurl upon those who had never wronged him, and when he remembered the stories told by trappers and bunters in the Yellowstone of the man's ferocity, he felt that it was better to run him down while he had the power to do so, and to make him a prisoner if possible, and kill him if he must.

He followed the trail of the madman for some little distance, when suddenly he saw coming toward him an Indian warrior.

The red-skin was slowly following the trail of

the madman and Buffalo Bill, made in going toward the cliff.

Hidden as he was in a thicket, the scout knew that he had the advantage, and intended giving the red-skin a surprise, when suddenly he discovered another mounted warrior in the rear of the first.

Not knowing how many more there might be, Buffalo Bill at once wheeled his horse about, made a quick circuit, and came out upon the bluff at a point where he remembered there was a large boulder behind which his horse could be concealed.

To hide the animal there, and then throw himself down behind the pile of rocks heaped up by the Mad Hercules, was but the work of an instant, and then the scout was ready for his foes, for, as he remarked to himself:

"If they grow too numerous for me, the general will send Frank Gourard and a few of the boys to my aid."

Buffalo Bill had not lain long in his retreat, when he beheld the Indian he had first seen come slowly over the ridge.

He was on foot now, and reconnoitered ahead of him with the greatest caution.

"He takes the skin-covered foot of the madman for a bear-track, and thinks I trailed it here to the rocks.

"Well, the circus will soon begin, for he thinks he'll get a scalp and bear-meat all waiting for him," and Buffalo Bill kept his eye at the crevice between the rocks, as he lay his full length upon the ground, and right upon the very edge of the cliff.

As though satisfied with his lookout ahead, the red-skin gave a movement of his hand to call his comrade on, and soon appeared over the hilltop the war-bonneted head of another red-skin, and he was mounted and leading his companion's pony.

"I wonder how many more there are?" muttered Buffalo Bill, as he got his matchless Winchester around ready for use.

The question was soon answered, for the first Indian had not gotten half-way down the ridge toward the cliff, when a third mounted warrior appeared, like the other in all the feathers and paint of a war-trail.

"That family of reds is increasing too fast to suit me," said Buffalo Bill.

But, though he knew a call for help would bring the soldiers quickly to his rescue, or as quickly as they could mount the steep slopes beyond the jutting bluff, he would not give that call until he felt that he needed aid.

"Only three of them," he said, grimly, as the first Indian now had approached within forty paces of him, and the other two came down the ridge with an air that plainly told his skilled eyes, practiced in every move a red-skin makes, that there were no more in their rear.

Having advanced to within fifteen paces of the pile of stones, the red-skin stood gazing upon them with a strange mixture of curiosity and dread in his face, for he could not apparently account for their being there.

A motion to his comrades caused them to dismount, fasten their horses and come toward him in that cautious, stealthy tread of an Indian, almost akin to a wild beast.

"Now this is crowding the animals," muttered Buffalo Bill, in his quiet, quaint and humorous way, and he added:

"I guess I'll stick up the notice—'Beware of the dog!'"

He saw that the three Indians were splendid specimens of savage manhood, tall, muscular, thoroughly armed,* and two of them wearing the barbarous insignia of warriors who had won their spurs, while the third, the one who had trailed, and now stood within a few paces of his hidden foe, had on all the paraphernalia of a great chief.

As Buffalo Bill uttered his last remark, he aimed his Winchester rifle at the red-skin furthest from him, and his finger lightly touched the trigger.

Ere the savage fell his length, a second shot brought down the other warrior, and then, with his ringing war-cry, Buffalo Bill arose to his feet, casting aside his rifle, and drawing a revolver.

The chief had started at the first shot, but, brave to recklessness, he had not attempted to spring to cover, but rather to rush toward the point of danger.

As he saw the tall form of the scout rise before him, he half-way halted, for he recognized one whom he had met before, and between whom and himself he knew there would be no mercy shown.

Instantly he gave his wild war-cry, as the second warrior fell, and shouted in the Cheyenne tongue:

"I know you, Pa e-has-ka!"

"You want to fight?"

"Come fight me!"

"I'll do it," shouted Buffalo Bill, and the revolvers of the two flashed together.

* During what is now known as the "Custer war," the Sioux and Cheyennes were armed with the latest patterns of fire-arms, procured in a manner which the Government should never have permitted.—THE AUTHOR.

The Indian staggered back, hard hit, but his aim was not as true, the bullet cutting only a slight gash in the scout's leg.

Without firing again the two now drew their knives and sprung upon each other.

Each caught the hand of the other in its first thrust for life, and clutching in the death embrace the two splendid specimens of athletic manhood, the red-skin and the pale face, staggered toward the edge of the cliff, where the eyes of those below fell upon them.

As the Indian chief struggled harder for the edge of the bluff, Buffalo Bill quickly recognized his purpose.

He had received, as he believed, his mortal wound, and was determined to spring over the cliff and carry his white foe with him.

Possessed of wonderful strength, for an instant Buffalo Bill almost felt that he would succeed; but, by a herculean effort he wrenched his hand from the grasp of the red-skin, and quick as a flash buried his knife to the very hilt in his heart.

Instantly the grip of the savage relaxed, and he sunk to the earth, upon the very edge of the cliff, while Buffalo Bill, dragging off the chief's war-bonnet, scalped him in the twinkling of an eye, and waving the red trophy, and its attachment of feathers and head-dress in the air, shouted in ringing tones:

"The first scalp for Custer."

In the wild hurrah that followed from the soldiers down on the plain, Buffalo Bill dodged back out of sight, and when, ten minutes after, General Carr and his guide reached the spot, he had disappeared.

The three red skins were there, the scalp-locks torn from their heads, their ponies were feeding near, but Buffalo Bill had gone, and Frank Gourard said:

"He are off ag'in on ther trail o' ther Herckiles, and ther Lord help ther madman when Bill do get his grip upon him."

"So say I, guide; but register three scalps to avenge poor Custer," responded General Carr.

"Thet are so, gin'r'al, Bill hev set in lively ter keep his oath, or I are a shrieakin' liar," was Frank Gourard's reply, as he went over the dead Indians, examining them with the air of one who was reading signs that would be of service to him.*

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS SHOT.

ALTHOUGH twice since leaving the bivouac of the military command on the prairie Buffalo Bill had come in full view of the soldiers, and in fact in easy talking range, he still persisted in keeping to his purpose to go alone upon his trail, lead him where it might.

As soon, therefore, as he had scalped the Indians,* a work he most scientifically performed, the scout caught and fastened their ponies, and then mounting his own horse, set out once more upon the trail of the madman.

He had no difficulty in finding it at the point where he had left off trailing when he discovered Yellow Hand and his two comrades, and at a rapid pace he went on, the Mad Hercules seemingly having made no effort to cover up his tracks.

Bill's horse was a good one, in fact the scout had never found the animal's equal upon the plains, both for endurance and speed, and at a swinging pace he continued his way without the slightest distress.

"That mad pilgrim is a goer," muttered Buffalo Bill, as he saw that the trail indicated the same long, swinging stride it had from the start.

At last the tracks led to the bank of a small stream; but across it had the madman gone, evidently without the slightest hesitation.

The course of the Mad Hercules lay straight for the Big Horn river, as though anxious to gain the shelter of the heavier hills about it, and perhaps thus make his way back to the Yellowstone, where it was said was his favorite tramping-ground.

"He is kind in taking this trail," said Bill, "for he does not lead us off our way, does he, old fellow?" and he patted his horse affectionately as he spoke.

After awhile he said, again addressing his horse, for want of a human companion:

"The general and the boys say we are fools, old horse, to go to Sitting Bull's camp.

"But we promised to do so, and we must keep our word, and I guess all will pan out well."

"But we'll find this Mad Hercules first, and discover just who he is."

"Old California Joe says he is a giant Barnum got in England, to show through the States, and that he caught the gold fever and ran off to California, and finding no gold for

* The Indian killed by Buffalo Bill, and who furnished "the first scalp for Custer," was a noted Cheyenne chief by the name of "Yellow Hand," and the son of "Cut Nose," also a famous chief.

* It was not the custom of Buffalo Bill to scalp red-skins; but knowing how highly the Indians prize their scalp-lock, and imbibited by the Custer massacre, he determined to do so upon his trail of revenge.—THE AUTHOR.

himself, killed some miners and took theirs, and then had to fly for his life.

"Wild Bill says he was a Kansas settler, and that all of his family were killed by red-skinned, led by white renegades, and it made him mad, and he took to the woods to kill."

"And he has killed pale-face, red-skin, Chinee and nigger ever since."

"But he kind of lit out when we tackled him, old horse, didn't he?"

"We must be holy terrors to make him skip as he did; but next time, perhaps, he may make us travel."

"Anyhow, we'll trail him down and find out."

The handsome boy, which Buffalo Bill had named not inappropriately, Red-skin, always pricked up his ears and tossed his head when his master talked to him, as though to express his appreciation of what was said, and one of these tosses of his proud head saved his life, as an arrow suddenly passed under his throat, just grazing the hair, and buried itself in a tree a few feet beyond him.

The whir of the arrow and thud, as it sunk into the tree, warned Buffalo Bill of danger, and wheeling to the rightabout, as though his horse was on a pivot, he sought the shelter of a thicket near by.

"Injuns, Red-skin, Injuns!" cried the scout, as he dismounted and fastened his horse to a sapling, at the same time unslinging his rifle ready for use.

After a short time spent in reconnoitering, he set off on foot to flank his unseen foe.

Most cautiously he went, dodging from tree to tree, and crawling where the space was open.

It took him a long time to make the circuit, but at last he stood by the side of the tree in which still stuck the arrow, and had been unable to find the slightest trace of a foe, or his trail even.

The arrow was drawn from the tree, into which the shaft had buried itself a couple of inches, showing that it had been sent with great force.

Closely examining it, Buffalo Bill saw that it was most skillfully made, yet did not look like Indian workmanship.

Again he searched through the timber, looking up into the trees and then around them upon the ground, at about the spot from whence the arrow must have been sent, yet not the slightest trace of a trail could he find.

"I am not one to believe in the supernatural; but the red-skinned and trappers say these hills are haunted, and if this don't look like the work of a spook Sitting Bull may have my scalp."

"I'll just emigrate from here," and mounting his horse once more, he continued on his way, still following the madman's trail, and wholly at a loss to account for the mysterious shot, that had evidently been fired at him with deadly intent.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE UNSEEN FOE.

NATURALLY following a trail is slow work, and so Buffalo Bill found it, with all his skill in prairie and wood-craft.

He had therefore not gone a score of miles when night came on and compelled him to go into camp.

Selecting a small canyon, on the sides of which the grass grew luxuriantly, and with a small rivulet in its center, he soon had as comfortable a camp for the night, as a man, accustomed to the hardships of a life on the plains could desire.

He built a tiny fire and broiled some dried buffalo-meat, and boiled a tin cup of coffee, which he ate with crackers.

Lighting his pipe he leaned back to think, and in spite of himself his thoughts would revert to the mysterious arrow-shot, which had been fired at him in the afternoon.

Though born on the border, and raised among a class of men, frontiersmen, who are as superstitious as sailors, yet Buffalo Bill was not a believer in the supernatural; still he could not but think of the strange stories he had heard regarding the spirits said to haunt the Big Horn mountains, and how trappers and hunters had been driven from them, and Indians too, by happenings there to them wholly unaccountable.

"It may have been the madman, who doubled upon me, and so hid his tracks I

could not find them; but then I do not think he could have been where I searched, and I not find his trail."

Hardly had the words left his lips when there came the *whir-r-r* of an arrow, and the feathered end just grazed his cheek, while passing on the shaft shivered itself against the rock beyond.

Instantly Buffalo Bill threw himself backward, out of the glimmering firelight, and crawling to the side of the canyon, determined to venture forth in the darkness in search of his unseen foe.

At full length upon the ground, and as noiselessly as a snake could have crawled, the scout entered the timber, bearing to the right, so as to get in the rear of the position where his unseen enemy must have stood when he fired the well-nigh fatal shot.

After long and tedious work he reached the place, and with the greatest caution went from tree to tree.

His little fire in the canyon hardly gave forth a glow, and yet he could have seen anything passing between its light and him.

Step by step he advanced back to the canyon, and at last reached his little camp, without having made the slightest discovery.

That the scout was worried there can be no doubt, for his confidence in himself in solving mysteries had twice had a set-back, and he was almost tempted to at once mount his horse and continue on his way, giving up following the trail of the Mad Hercules.

But he set his will against this desire, and rolling himself in his blanket, sought slumber, which, after a long time of restlessness, came to him.

The rising sun was just gilding the tree-tops when he awoke, and quickly he began his search, under broad daylight, for any trace left by his unseen foe.

But not a track or trail could he find, and more than ever convinced that the Big Horn mountains were inhabited by most mysterious beings, if not spooks, he mounted his horse and rode on once more as before, following the trail of the Mad Hercules.

The nature of the country on that day's travel was such that the scout had difficult work in keeping the trail, although the madman seemed still not to make the slightest effort to cover up his tracks.

Only several miles from where Buffalo Bill had camped he found the fire, still burning, where the Mad Hercules had passed the night, and the remains of a deer proved that his night and morning repast had been of fresh venison, which he had shot where he encamped.

As the fugitive had had nearly two hours' good start of the scout, their night camps being but a few miles apart proved that the latter was gaining, and that the former had decreased the rate of speed at which he had started out, but more from inclination than from fatigue, Bill judged by the trail.

Pressing on at a more rapid pace, and which could but be a fast walk, as the trail was obscure, Buffalo Bill determined to come up with the madman as soon as possible, and settle scores with him, that he might then go on after Sitting Bull to carry out his work of revenge against the slayers of Custer and his men.

Buffalo Bill knew Sitting Bull well, or, that is, as well as any white man knew him, for the wily chief had a hatred for the pale-faces that caused him to keep constantly aloof from them.

The scout was aware that he was a man of vast influence with all Sioux, and having associated with him Crazy Horse and his people, he could put an army of thousands of warriors into the field to oppose the troops which would be sent to avenge the Custer massacre.

And knowing well that this army of red-skins would be most thoroughly armed* and

* It is a notorious fact that the Sioux Indians, for four years immediately preceding the Custer massacre, were regularly supplied with the most improved fire-arms and ammunition by the agencies at Brule, Grand River, Standing Rock, Fort Berthold, Cheyenne and Fort Peck. Even during the campaign of 1876, in the months of May, June and July, just before and after Custer and his band of heroes rode down into the valley of death, these fighting Indians received eleven hundred and twenty Winchester and Remington rifles, and 413,000 rounds of patent ammunition, besides large quantities of loose powder, lead and primers, while during the summer of 1875 they received several thousand stand of arms and more than a million rounds of ammunition. With this generous provision there is no cause for wonder

well mounted, besides having with them their squaws and children, they would fight to the bitter end under their idolized chief, Buffalo Bill was anxious to end the days of that leader, if it lay in his power, and thus bring demoralization upon the Indians.

Trailing through the day, night still found the scout upon the track of the Mad Hercules, and not daring to leave it for fear of losing it in the darkness, he "camped on the trail" once more.

During the day he had not had a reminder that he was dogged by his unseen foe; but hardly had he tied his horse in a dense thicket, where he intended to pass the night, when the ominous *whir-r-r* of an arrow was heard, and his broad sombrero was pierced through the rim by the shaft.

It was still good twilight, and hardly had the arrow cut through his hat when, reckless of all consequences, Buffalo Bill had drawn a revolver and was bounding from the thicket in the direction from whence it came.

His sudden and evidently unexpected act was rewarded by a sight of the one who had aimed at his life, and he sprung forward with immense leaps, crying through his shut teeth:

"Spook or Satan! I'll solve this mystery now!"

CHAPTER XVII.

CHASING A SPOOK.

WHETHER Buffalo Bill had held himself in readiness every instant in the day, to be ready to take quick and urgent measures to discover who was his unseen foe, if he should have another arrow sent after him, it is certain that hardly had his hand been pierced by the point, before he was bounding away in the direction whence he would be most certain to find the one who held the bow that had sent the shaft.

He had not taken a second bound before, as I have said, his keen eyes detected a form some sixty paces distant.

It had just dodged back behind a large tree, and, bounding forward, Buffalo Bill made straight for the spot, regardless of the fact that he might get a second shot which would be fatal.

Once out of the dense thicket, in which he had pitched his camp for the night, the timber was scattering, with here and there a large boulder, and these were at once taken advantage of to protect him in his charge upon his unseen foe.

But when Buffalo Bill ran boldly up to the tree, behind which he had seen the form, no one was visible.

The tree stood apart from the others, with no rock near, so that it would have been impossible for the person, whoever it was, to leave its shelter without his having discovered it.

In the fading twilight he looked for a trail at the base of the tree, yet could find none.

Then he glanced overhead, and saw that the foliage was thick, and the branches far too high for any one to spring up to them from the ground.

What had become of this mysterious foe he could not understand.

"Well, this is mysterious," he said to himself.

"But, if the spook, or human, or whatever it is, keeps on practicing, he will nail me yet."

"I guess the boys are right, and that the Big Horn mountains are haunted."

"At least they seem to me to be the headquarters for spooks, and I'll be glad when I am out of them."

Leaving his horse at one place, the scout then went off to another, and, realizing that he dared not light a fire, ate a cold snack and lay down to rest.

He awoke from some cause before dawn,

that the Sioux were able to resist the Government and attract to their aid all the dissatisfied Cheyennes and other Indians in the Northwest.

Besides a perfect fighting equipment, all the Indians recognized in Sitting Bull the elements of a great warrior, one whose superior, perhaps, has never been known among any tribe; he combined all the strategic cunning of Tecumseh, with the cruel uncompromising hatred of Black Kettle, while his leadership was far superior to both. Having decided to precipitate a terrible war, he chose his position with consummate judgment, selecting a central vantage point surrounded by what is known as the "bad lands," and then kept his supply source open by an assumed friendship with the Canadian French.

and started to his feet with the feeling that a human presence was near him.

But no one was visible in the darkness, and as it was nearly dawn, he determined to start upon his way, trusting to luck to find the trail of the Mad Hercules further down the valley, which he knew would bring him out near the river.

To his surprise, as he stepped up to his horse, he found him both saddled and bridled, yet still staked out with the lariat.

"By Jove! but the spook was going to take a ride," he exclaimed, in the greatest surprise.

He knew that he had unsaddled the animal as soon as he halted the night before, and staked him out upon the best spot he could find for him to feed.

The saddle and bridle he had hung upon a tree near by, and now he found them upon his horse.

"Come, Red-skin, who did this?" he asked of the horse.

"Have the witches been riding you?

"No, your mane is not tangled,"* but my thoughts are, and I'll get out of this before I have a witch riding behind me."

The scout spoke half in earnest, half in jest, for, in spite of his sound sense, he was sadly mystified by all that had occurred of late, from the massacre on the Big Horn, and the meeting of the Mad Hercules, to being trailed by an unseen foe whose movements he could not account for.

Mounting his horse he rode out of the thicket, to suddenly draw rein quickly, and half-throw his rifle to his shoulder.

Then he checked this purpose, and driving the spurs into the flanks of Red-skin shot away like the wind in pursuit of an object that had suddenly caught his quick eye.

What he went in pursuit of seemed to fly rather than run.

It appeared in the darkness to be a human being, and yet, though now running for a few paces, would seem to bound up into the air and fly along for a short space.

Fortunately for the scout, and unfortunately for the pursued, the valley there narrowed into a canyon with steep sides, wholly inaccessible to the foot of man or beast, so that, forced to fly down it, there was no turning-off point which could be taken to elude the swift steed in chase.

Had it been otherwise, Buffalo Bill could have been easily thrown off the pursuit, by the one he was endeavoring to catch dodging behind rocks and trees.

"Come, Red-skin, don't let even a spook outrun you," cried Bill, urging the animal forward, while he held the reins firmly in one hand and his revolver in the other.

His eyes he kept fixed upon the running, leaping, flying creature he was in chase of, and which he momentarily feared would vanish in some mysterious manner from his sight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RUN DOWN.

As the flight and pursuit continued, Buffalo Bill was pleased to see that the one he was pressing so hotly did not disappear, but continued his running, flying flight, as it were, down the canyon.

Red-skin was making good time, over the rough footing, but could have doubled his pace had the nature of the ground permitted.

But this might also have retarded the fugitive, who certainly seemed to be getting along with deer-like fleetness.

As the end of the canyon drew near Buffalo Bill pressed on faster and gained more rapidly, and he was glad to see in the uncertain light that an open plain lay beyond.

Once there, he felt he could force his horse to a pace that would not keep him long behind the one he pursued.

At length the fugitive bounded out of the canyon, swayed to the right, then to the left, as though searching for some spot where he could find cover, and, as though discovering no vantage-ground for him, he went straight ahead once more, aiming for the line of timber a quarter of a mile beyond, which fringed the river's bank.

And the renewed speed with which he

* There is an old superstition that when the mane of a horse is found tangled he has been ridden by witches during the night.—THE AUTHOR.

started off fairly amazed the scout who had hardly believed it possible for a human being to get over the ground that fast.

"Come, old horse, now show your mettle, and catch yonder What-is-It, be it spook, Injun or devil!" cried Buffalo Bill, pressing hard after the flying creature in advance.

At the words of his rider the noble animal shot forward like an arrow from a bow.

It did not take the scout but an instant to see that he was gaining upon the pursued, and that at the pace he was riding he would overtake the fugitive before he could reach the river.

That this discovery was also made by the other was evident, for, with no tree, bush or rock near to afford the slightest shelter, the flying form suddenly turned to the right-about, dropped upon one knee, and sent an arrow straight at the scout as he came on.

It was well aimed, but struck the butt of a revolver in Buffalo Bill's belt and glanced off, and while another arrow was being fitted to the bow, there came the flash and crack of the scout's pistol.

Over on his face fell the fugitive, and the next instant Buffalo Bill drew up his panting horse and sprung to the ground.

A deep groan told him that his shot had not proven instantly fatal, and staking out Red-skin he returned and bent over the form that now lay in a heap before him.

The dawn was just breaking over the hill-tops, and there was light enough to see that the one at his feet was an Indian.

Turning him over upon his back Bill saw that he yet lived, and gazed unflinchingly in his face, though the blood was oozing from a bullet-wound above his heart.

That he had seen the Indian before he knew, and it at once dawned upon him where:

But he asked in the Sioux tongue:

"Who are you?"

"Ne-ta-ka,"* was the low reply.

He was a young warrior, and one whose fame as a runner and leaper had spread along the border.

Buffalo Bill had often heard of his wonderful speed on foot, and he now saw lying beside him a long, slender pole, the end of which was covered with buckskin, like the head of a drumstick, to prevent its impress upon the ground.

With this pole the Flyer had made his wonderful leaps as he ran.

And more, the scout discovered that he carried upon his back something like a pair of snow-shoes, with moccasins fitted upon them, and besides, a lariat of great length, several quivers of arrows, like those that had been shot at him, and a long bow, which he now grasped tightly in his hand, though possessing no power to use it.

He possessed a lithe, tall form, wore leggings and moccasins, but no hunting-shirt, and a blanket was swung at his back.

The Flyer is a warrior of the Death Killer's medicine-lodge!" said Buffalo Bill, remembering to have seen the Indian upon the Big Horn battle-field, and as one of the band of the renegade Bill Bevins.

"The Long Hair speaks straight," was the low reply, though uttering the words made the young brave wince with the anguish he suffered.

"The Death Killer sent the Flyer on the trail of the Long Hair to kill him?"

The Indian nodded assent.

"The Death Killer did not believe that the Long Hair would go to the village of Sitting Bull?"

The red-skin shook his head to express the negative.

"The Long Hair is going there now."

The Indian looked his admiration at so bold a deed, but made no reply, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"The Long Hair will tell the people of the Flyer how he died, that he buried him where his kindred can find his grave."

"Let the Long Hair not speak of Ne-ta-ka to his people when he wears his scalp at his belt," said the warrior in a tone that showed how bitter a blow it was for him to lose it.

"The Flyer is a great brave, he came upon the trail of Pa-e-has-ka to kill him, but he has fallen and will die, yet I will not take his scalp."

The eyes of the red-skin, though almost

* The Flyer, or Leaper.—THE AUTHOR.

glazed by death, flashed with delight at this promise, and he said quickly:

"Ne-ta-ka will call Pa-e-has-ka his white brother when he goes to the Happy Hunting-Grounds."

Whether Buffalo Bill felt complimented by this promise or not, he certainly acted most kindly toward the dying red-skin, and feeling a little curious to settle the mysterious movements of The Flyer, after his shots at him, asked:

"Why is it that Ne-ta-ka left no trail when he came near my camp?"

The Indian pointed to the articles that looked like snow-shoes, but uttered no word.

"Well, you are a genius," muttered Bill, while he added, speaking to himself:

"Those willow shoes certainly would leave no trail, the pole explains his seeming to fly through the air as he ran, but now to find out where he went after firing at me."

Turning to the Indian he asked:

"Where did Ne-ta-ka go after he fired at Pa-e-has-ka from behind the tree?"

The red-skin raised his hand with an effort and placed it upon his coiled lasso.

Then he pointed upward and said in a whisper, for his strength was rapidly failing:

"Ne-ta-ka fastened lariat to tree, shot arrow, and climbed up lariat and hide in tree."

"Aha! that is a dodge I had not thought of before."

"Why, this red-skin is a perfect book to me, and I'll appropriate his stock in trade and practice his little games, for they may come in useful— Ha! that's music, and I know the tune!"

The last remark was caused by suddenly hearing several shots and yells break upon the morning air, and coming from the direction of the timber.

The red-skin heard the sounds too, and half-raised himself upon his arm, to watch Buffalo Bill spring upon his horse and dash away like the wind, in the direction from whence had come the shots and cries.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAD HERCULES AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

It was but a few moments' ride to the belt of woods that girded the banks of the river, and into the timber Buffalo Bill dashed at full speed.

Before him, and some hundred yards distant, he heard the wild yells of combatants.

There were no shots fired now, only heavy thuds heard, mingled with yells of rage and cries of seeming anguish.

Straight upon the scene Buffalo Bill rode, his reins held firmly in his teeth, and a revolver in each hand.

There was an open space upon the bank, a fallen tree, against which a fire was burning, and the appearance of a camp.

Against the roots of this tree, for it had been prostrated by the wind, stood none other than the Mad Hercules.

But he was not alone, for he was confronted by half a dozen painted warriors, armed with knives, who were dodging about in an effort to run in upon him and strike at his heart.

At his feet lay two dead braves, who had fallen in making the attempt, and upon one of these his right foot rested, while he stood at bay, his long knife grasped in hand ready for the attack.

His face was bleeding, also one hand was stained red, either from his blood or that of his foes, but he stood his ground with seeming delight in the mad combat.

His revolvers were in his belt, and had evidently been emptied, as off some distance lay three more savages, dead, and several of those who faced him bore wounds.

It was a thrilling picture, and so wrapped up were the contestants that they neither saw nor heard Buffalo Bill.

As he drew nearer, he discovered that the Indians were Sioux, evidently a scouting party from Sitting Bull's tribe, and he was determined to take a hand in the fracas.

Before he charged, however, upon the scene, he saw another venturesome warrior spring in upon the madman and fall dead from a fearful thrust that met him.

With his ringing war-cry, known to all the tribes on the northwest border, Buffalo Bill charged upon the scene.

Straight at the warriors the well-trained horse went, and the revolvers rattled forth death-knells upon either side.

One, two, three braves fell, and Red-skin and his master had dashed by, for smarting under an arrow wound, the noble animal could not be checked by word.

As soon as he could replace his revolvers, Buffalo Bill drew on the reins and checked the headlong flight of his horse, and wheeled back to again join in the fray.

But in the moment that had passed since he charged upon the scene both the remaining Indians and the Mad Hercules had disappeared.

The dead lay as they had fallen, the trio who had been shot by Buffalo Bill adding to the list slain by the madman.

A splashing sound catching his ears, Buffalo Bill discovered the huge dripping form of the Mad Hercules just leaving the river upon the opposite shore, and clambering up the bank.

Like a huge grizzly bear he looked, his hairy attire dripping wet, and presenting a good mark for a bullet.

The scout half threw his rifle to his shoulder, as if to fire, but instantly checked his purpose, and slung it again upon his back, with the remark:

"I'll not kill a flying foe; but some time soon we'll meet again, old Shanghai grizzly.

Then he turned to his faithful steed, dressed the wound in his hip most skillfully, and staking him out to feed, began to look around him.

His skillful eyes soon read the signs he saw, that the Mad Hercules had been encamped there for the night, and was cooking his breakfast, preparatory to starting again upon the tramp, when the red-skins, seeing his fire from the other shore, had crossed and attacked him, and with far more detriment to themselves than the wandering giant.

The trail of the two Indians who had escaped Buffalo Bill then followed a short distance down the river, to see that they had really gone, and then, as he began to closely peer into the timber upon the other bank, to see what had become of their ponies, for he knew that they had been mounted,* when he heard a wild yell, then a war-cry, and following them came the crashing of large bodies through the thicket, and into view dashed the Mad Hercules, mounted upon a large spotted pony, and driving before him a dozen mustangs equipped with Indian trap-pings.

"Now the old traveling asylum is fixed, for he's going hoof-back on his trail, and it'll take a drove of ponies to carry him far.

"Two, four, eight, twelve! Yes, there were twelve in the band, and they left one over there to guard the ponies, and the crazy Shanghai settled him.

"Twelve big Injuns,
Ten got called in,
And that leaves two,

or words to that effect, as the song goes.

"Well, Red-skin, we can follow Hairy Hercules's trail now without trouble, I guess; but I'll first go back and see if the Flyer is dead, and then I can come back and eat my breakfast in comfort, for I see the madman left me some fresh game in the hurry of his departure."

So saying, Buffalo Bill strode away toward the little prairie, where he had left *Ne-ta-ka* dying.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO CLAIMANTS FOR A SCALP.

As Buffalo Bill started to leave the spot where lay the dead Indians, and go upon his errand, of keeping his word to *Ne-ta-ka* there suddenly came to his ears the sound of a distant shot,

From exactly the direction from whence it came he did not know, but it seemed to be quite far off.

It sounded to his ears more like the ring of a rifle than the sharp crack of a revolver, and he paused to listen if it was repeated, while Red-skin pricked up his ears, as though snuffing danger from afar.

"The old crazy grizzly has jumped another red-skin, or he's killing the mustangs for luck," said Bill, believing the sound must have come from the direction the madman had taken.

But the instinct of the horse, more keen

*Sioux, like Comanches, are born horsemen, and never seem at home on foot. A Sioux Indian would rather be well mounted than armed.—THE AUTHOR.

than that of the human being, caused him to look in the direction from whence the sound of the shot had come, and his slender ears were pointed toward the back-trail, in the direction where the scout had left *Ne-ta-ka*.

As though convinced that the madman had fired the shot, Buffalo Bill paid no more attention to it, but walked rapidly through the timber, and soon came out upon the little opening, or prairie.

He saw *Ne-ta-ka* lying where he had left him; but as he approached he beheld that his position had changed, and from all appearances he seemed to have died hard and in great agony, for the red-skin was dead.

Gathering up his leaping-pole, trackless shoes, and other paraphernalia, the scout raised the dead red-skin to his shoulders and strode back into the timber.

Selecting a good spot upon the river bank, at the foot of a large tree, he laid the body down, and marked out a space for a grave.

"I'd like to plant the whole lot," he muttered, glancing over toward the Indians slain by the madman and himself, and then he added, in his light-hearted way:

"But life's too short to bury the undeserving, especially Injuns.

"Still, I will take time, after I have had breakfast to raise the scalps of the three graceless I slew, for I want to get scalps enough to make a hair rope to hang Bill Bevins with, and if I do get my death-grip on that many red-skins, my oath to avenge poor Custer will have been kept."

As Buffalo Bill ceased speaking, and turned away from the tree, at the foot of which lay the body of *Ne-ta-ka*, even his keen eyes failed to notice a human face dodge back below the river bank.

Feeling the need of food, the scout set to work to first cook and eat his breakfast before digging the grave he had promised for *Ne-ta-ka*.

A few pieces of juicy meat were cut from the haunch of venison left by the madman, and placed upon the coals to broil.

Then water was gotten from the river, and a quart cup of coffee put on to boil.

Taking some crackers from his haversack attached to his saddle, Buffalo Bill sat down to eat his breakfast with seeming relish, wholly indifferent to danger, and also of the dead brave lying so near him.

Also was he unconscious that the same human face that had peered over the river bank was still turned upon him, but its owner had watched his chance to spring behind the tree, at the foot of which lay *Ne-ta-ka*.

Having partaken of his lonely breakfast, Buffalo Bill arose to work, his first duty being to neatly deprive the three braves he had slain of their scalp-locks.

Attaching them to the string that held the others, at the top of which was Yellow Hand's, he stepped forward, knife in hand, to dig the grave of *Ne-ta-ka*.

But suddenly a human form confronted him, and a voice said:

"Pard, I guesses I'll take the scalp o' this Injun, what you stole from me, an' as I holds ther drop on you, ye'd better be kinder discreet like."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOSS OF THE BIG HORN.

BUFFALO BILL was certainly caught off his guard by the appearance of the stranger upon the scene where he least expected to see a human being, unless it might be a stray Indian, or the madman returning.

But it was neither.

Yet it was a white man, and certainly an odd-looking one.

He was dressed in rudely tanned buckskin from head to foot, for he wore a cap of that material, ornamented with the tail of a fox for a tassel.

He was a man of large size, muscular build, and looked hard as a pine-knot, while his hair was long, unkempt, and iron-gray, and his beard, short and grizzly, half hiding a face by no means prepossessing in the features that were visible.

He was armed with an old rifle, a muzzle-loader, a revolver of rather ancient manufacture, a couple of single-barrel pistols and a large bowie-knife, while at his back hung a long bow and two quivers of arrows.

The eyes that gazed upon Buffalo Bill with a triumphant leer were vicious, small, and

glittered with hate, that seemed their natural expression.

He held his revolver upon Buffalo Bill to cover his heart, and seemed to feel that he was wholly master of the situation.

"Well, who in thunder are you, you old sinner?" demanded Buffalo Bill, seemingly not in the slightest degree taken aback by the sudden appearance of one that seemed to be a foe.

"I are ther Boss o' ther Big Horn," was the cool reply.

"The what?" and Bill smiled.

"Ther Boss o' ther Big Horn."

"You don't mean it?"

"I does."

"Well, you do look as if you could get away with a big horn."

"Look a-heur, stranger pard, is yer pokin' fun at me?" angrily asked the man.

"No, you are poking that old pepper-box at me," was the cool response.

"Who is you, anyhow?" asked the man, struck with the superb bearing and handsome, fearless face of the scout.

"Sitting Bull," answered Bill, most innocently.

"Does yer take me fer a fool?"

"If I did I wouldn't be far off the trail."

"I knows Sitting Bull, an' he are a screamer fer a Injun."

"Like as not you are one of the renegades said to belong to his tribe," was the bold remark of the scout.

"No, but I are friendly with the Injuns."

"That means you dare not live among your own race, for you look as though you might have been a white man once."

The basilisk eyes of the stranger fairly blazed at this, and his brow grew dark with rage, while he answered quickly:

"Ef I are, yer'll never live ter tell that yer seen me."

"I'll stake that I do. Come, put up your money, or make no threats."

"Waal, you is a bold one, and I'd like ter know yer handle?"

"The boys in camp call me Buffalo Bill."

Instantly the man's face changed again, growing livid with passion, while he hissed forth:

"You is Bill Cody, is you?"

"When I am at home that is my name," was the reply, and Bill continued:

"Now tell me your name, for the more I see of your face the more I feel we have met before."

"We has."

"What deviltry were you in when I saw you last, old man?"

"I'll tell yer jist what I were doing then."

"It were a long time ago, and you was a mere boy then, and you was guide fer a train I went ter rob one night, and—"

"You are Ginger Sam, by Jove!" cried Bill recalling the man's face, after nearly twenty years.

"I are."

"I remember you now, you miserable old sinner, and how you and your gang hired as teamsters to the train and intended to massacre all hands one night, and get the booty."

"Thet are so; but you overheard two o' ther boys talkin', and ther' were hangin' done by ther train people, an' I'd hev gone ther same way ef I hadn't lit out."

"Yer thwarted me then, Bill Cody, and I has heered o' yer doin' big things o' late on these heur borders, an' I intends ter cut yer days short."

"And I have heard how you played your old tricks of deviltry until you could not live in a border settlement, and here is where you came to hide your ugly head, was it?"

"Yas, and it are better than hangin'."

"You are a hard citizen, Ginger Sam," said Bill, with a light laugh, although the man still kept him covered with his revolver.

"I are a citizen that shall take in Buf'ler Bill, fer yer hes no business in these heur parts, and hevin' comed heur, I'll see that yer remain, fer I are ther Boss o' ther Big Horn, I told yer."

"Do you see these dead Injuns lying about here?" asked Bill.

"I does."

"Well, you had better spend your time burying them, than in killing me, for it will be more profitable business."

The outlaw was astounded at the cool nerve displayed by Bill in his danger, and could not understand his light, bantering tone.

He meant to kill him, there was no doubt; but as a cat will play with a mouse to torture it, he wished to make Buffalo Bill suffer terror and despair, so delayed firing the fatal shot, feeling that he had him at his mercy wholly.

"I kilt that Injun, an' what you fatched him hear fer I does not know; but I claims his scalp," and the Boss of the Big Horn pointed to the dead body of *Ne-ta-ka*.

"You killed that Indian?" asked Bill.

"I said so," responded the Boss of the Big Horn.

"Why, I shot him myself," said Bill.

"You went out on the prairie an' fatched him in arter I kilt him."

"Oh, Lord! but what a holy liar you are, Ginger Sam!"

"Does yer say *you* kilt that Injun, Bill Cody?"

"I do."

"I tell yer I left my cabin 'arly ter git game, an' I were jist leavin' ther timber when I seen that Injun drop down on ther prairie, hevin' got sight o' me, I s'pose."

"So I cracks away, an' I seen him flop over an' then lie still; but I lays close, fer I thought t'others mout be near, an' then I seen you come out o' ther timber from this p'int an' pick him up an' fetch him hear."

"I flanked yer posish, and I hes been lookin' at yer fer a long time, an' now yer says you kilt ther red."

"And I tell you the truth, and I can prove it."

"How kin yer?"

"Where did you aim to hit him?"

"In the heart."

"Well, look and see if there are two bullet-wounds in his body, for I heard your shot, I remember now, and have no doubt but that you fired at him; but he was dying when you did so."

"Look for the two wounds, Big Horn Boss."

The man stooped to do so, and with the bound of a panther Buffalo Bill was upon him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GRAVE-DIGGER.

THROWN off his guard by the manner of the scout, and his interest in searching for a second wound in the body of the Indian, Ginger Sam went right into the trap which was set for him, and did just what Buffalo Bill had been endeavoring he should do.

Quick as lightning in his movements, Buffalo Bill had sprung forward and seized the hand that held the revolver, before the outlaw could come to an upright position, and at the same time he presented one of his own weapons full in the face of his foe, while he said, in the coolest manner possible:

"If you wish to keep in good health, Ginger Sam, you'll do as I tell you!"

The outlaw was livid with rage, and seemed to feel that his last day on earth had come.

He loved life, even alone in those wilds, and asked, hoarsely:

"Does yer intend ter kill me?"

"I do not know what I shall do with you in the end, but at present I intend to disarm you."

"Drop old Daniel Boone's rifle you hold in your hand there."

"It mout break it."

"I guess not, for it's too old a settler to be hurt by a little tumble."

"Drop it, I say."

"It mout go off an' shoot yer from ther concussion."

"My revolver will go off and shoot you from the muzzle, if you don't obey!"

"Down she goes."

The outlaw dropped it in such a way, at the same time giving it a kick, that showed he would like to have it explode in the fall and kill his captor.

But it did not, and kicking it one side, Bill commanded:

"Now unbuckle your belt and let it fall!"

"Now that would be dangerous."

"Do as I tell you, and be careful not to let your hand touch those blunderbusses you carry, or you won't know what killed you."

The man uttered an oath, but obeyed, and the belt of arms fell to the ground.

"Now step this way."

Bill drew him a few steps away from his rifle and belt, and then, with a sudden, violent wrench of the wrist, tore the revolver from the outlaw's hand and pitched it over with the other weapons.

"Now, Boss of the Big Horn, I was born tired, and don't like work, so take your knife and set to work to build a house under this tree," said Bill.

"A house?" asked the surprised man.

"Yes."

"What kind of a house?"

"One that will fit a dead man."

"Yer mean a grave?" asked the outlaw, in a tone of horror.

"I do."

"Yer don't mean ter kill me, and fust make me dig my own grave?" and the voice of the speaker was low and tremulous.

"No, you are not worth burying; but I wish to bury that Injun there, because I promised him I would, and being lazy, as I told you, I want you to dig his grave."

The outlaw seemed to feel relieved in knowing that he was not the one to occupy the grave, and he at once set to work, and with his knife began to throw out the earth quite rapidly.

Buffalo Bill coolly sat near watching him, and keeping him covered with his revolver, and noticing the rapid work of the outlaw, he said:

"I guess you were sexton for some graveyard, Ginger Sam, before you took to thieving?"

"Thet are jist what I were, Bill Cody," and the man stopped in his work.

"And you took to robbing by night the people you buried by day, and got caught at it, I guess, so had to follow the lamented Horace Greeley's advice and dig for the West?"

"Waal, you hits things pretty squar', Bill Cody, fer they did plant a leddy in my yard one day, thet were durned fool enough ter leave it in her will thet she were ter be buried in her di'mints an' t'other jew'lry."

"I know'd ther kin-folks w'u'd dig her up some night, ef I didn't, so I did, an' them as was comin' ter do it seen me, an' I jist hed ter light out from them parts."

"Well, you look the ghoul you are; but go on with your work, for life's too short to listen to your sins, old man!"

The ex-sexton resumed his work with a sigh, and soon had an opening which brought from the scout the remark:

"No Injun could wish for more than that, Ginger Sam, and you are the Boss Grave-Digger of the Big Horn, whatever your other sins may be."

"Now wrap that Injun in his blanket and lay him in it; but leave out his traps and weapons!"

"Won't yer scalp him?"

"No."

"What about t'others?"

"Let them remain where they are."

"Three of 'em is scalped."

"Those I killed."

"And t'others?"

"Have you ever heard of Mad Hercules of the Yellowstone?"

"I has, an' I never wants ter see him ag'in."

"You hev seen him then?"

"Hev I?"

"Waal now he nearly skeert me ter death one night; but he didn't see me, altho' he comed almost up to my cabin door."

"He are a hairy terror."

"Well, he killed those other Indians."

"Are he near hear?"

"He went down the river awhile since."

"Are he a-comin' back?" and the outlaw showed real terror.

"No, but I shall go after him, and if I don't have to kill you before I start, I shall take you along."

"Lord hev marcy!"

"Come, bury that Injun."

"Yer seems ter feel tender fer this hear red."

"I promised him that I would not scalp him, and that I would bury him."

"I guesses yer'll be 'rectin' a moniment over him afore long," sneered the outlaw.

"I may leave you dead across his grave as a monument," was the cool reply.

The outlaw did not relish this remark, and at once wrapped the blanket of *Ne-ta-ka* around him, and placing him in the grave asked him in a tone of sarcasm:

"Does yer intend ter shriek pra'er over him?"

"No!"

"Does yer know any?"

"If I did, it would be desecration to utter them, even over a dead Indian, in your vile presence," was the stern retort.

"Ef yer don't, I does, fer I l'arnt all kinds when I were grave-digger."

"Now, I doesn't know ther creed o' this red-skin; but ef yer kin guess at it, I kin fit him with a sarvice ter suit Presb'erte'ran, 'Piscopal, Meth'dist, Hard-shell or Soft-shell Baptist or Cath'lics, fer ef thar is anything I does know, it are how ter pray an' ter shoot."

"Well, you better indulge in praying for yourself, for you'll never do any more shooting, Ginger Sam."

"There, that is a first-class grave, and now we will put a few heavy logs over it, to prevent the wolves from tearing up the body."

"And then, pard?"

"Then I shall decide what I shall do with you."

"Are I ter be axed?"

"No; for I know half-a-dozen murders you committed that would hang you—Hal!"

The scout's words were suddenly checked, for distinctly, though distant, there came to his ears the sound of a bugle.

"Grave-digger's Carnival! but what are thet?" cried the outlaw.

"A cavalry bugle."

"Is thar cavalry in these hear mountains?"

"Yes; and their trail will come right through here."

"Whar'll we be?" asked the outlaw, most anxiously.

"I'll be riding down the river."

"An' me?"

"I'll leave you as a present for the general, who I know would be glad to get you," was the cool reply.

"Don't do it, Bill, and I'll do ther squar' thing by you."

"Look here, Ginger Sam, I know just what you are, and if I let you go, I know many an innocent man would be the sufferer by it, for you hide in these mountains and shoot down every one of your own race who comes here, for fear you may be seen and recognized."

"You thought you had the dead drop on me, and I saw it in your eyes that you intended to kill me—"

"No, Bill, I sw'ar I didn't."

"I would not believe you on oath, Ginger Sam, and it is my duty to give you up to General Carr, who is coming this way with his command."

Quick as a flash Buffalo Bill, who held in one hand a lariat he had taken from one of the dead Indians, threw the coil over the head of the outlaw, and the arms were pinioned down to his side.

Taking a turn around the tree by which they stood, Buffalo Bill quickly and skillfully bound the struggling wretch to it, and in such a way that escape was impossible.

Then he took from his pocket a note-book and pencil, and tearing out a leaf, wrote thereon:

"GENERAL:—

"I leave this man for you to decide his fate."

"He was known years ago as Ginger Sam, and plotted to rob a train I was guide of, and to kill the people."

"He has committed many murders on the border, as any old borderman can tell you, upon hearing his name."

This Buffalo Bill tacked upon the tree to which the villain was bound, and unheeding the begging of the prisoner to let him go, intermingled with curses at his not doing so, he mounted his horse and rode toward the timber fronting on the little prairie.

Quickly he drew his horse back in the shadow, for he saw Frank Gourard, the guide, there, bending over the spot where *Ne-ta-ka* had fallen, while just coming around a spur of the mountain was the head of the command.

Wheeling his horse about, the scout galloped back to the river, and plunging boldly in, made for the other shore, carrying with

him the leaping-pole and other traps of the Flyer.

Once upon the other side he came upon a dead Indian, the warrior who had been slain by the Mad Hercules, while guarding the ponies, and taking the trail of the animals, he went off rapidly in pursuit, just as the guide and General Carr rode into the timber, to discover the strange scene there awaiting them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH SENTENCE.

The command of General Carr, in marching to the scene of the Custer massacre, had been delayed by the roughness of the trail which it had to follow, as the wagons and ambulances were not able to make as good time as he wished, yet the commander dared not leave his train behind.

Congratulating himself upon having reached the river's vicinity, the general gave orders to press on hard, as the traveling would be better, and Frank Gourard had just ridden on to scout ahead a mile or two, when he discovered the trail left by not only the mad Hercules, but Buffalo Bill and the Sioux Leaper, of whom the scout had been in chase.

He called to the bugler, who was near, to blow a call that would bring the general, who had gone back toward the rear to bring on the column, and it was these notes that had reached the ears of the scout and his prisoner.

Then the guide rode slowly on until he came to the spot where the warrior had fallen before Buffalo Bill's shot, and noticing the red stains upon the ground he dismounted and awaited the coming of the general.

"Thar has been music heur, gin'ral," he said, as General Carr rode up.

"What kind of music, guide?" asked the officer.

"Ther dead march hev been played fer somebody ter dance by."

"You see signs, then, Frank, that there has been trouble?"

"Yes, gin'ral, I does."

"I seen fust an' foremost ther trail o' ther mad critter back yonder."

"The Mad Hercules?"

"Thet same."

"Well?"

"Then I seen whar Bufler Bill were hot travelin' arter a Injun that jumped thirty feet at every clip, he were so skeert, an' here are whar he stopped his jumpin'."

"You are sure it was the Indian?" somewhat anxiously asked the general.

"I is fer a fact, gin'ral, fer thar are ther boot-tracks o' Bill, an' heur are whar ther Injun clawed round right sharp."

"But where is he?"

"Thar yer hes me; but I guesses them timber will illoocidate ther question, gin'ral."

"Then come on, and let us ride into the timber."

"Better let me reconnoiter fust, gin'ral."

"No, I will go with you."

"Come, guide, let us lose no time."

The guide threw himself once more into his saddle and followed the general, who could not withstand his impatience to see what secret the timber might reveal.

He had a high regard for Buffalo Bill,* and knowing his daring nature, prone to recklessness, constantly feared that he would run into some danger, when in playing a desperate game with Death the scout would be the loser.

"Waal, ef there hain't been a ring-tailed monkey cirkiss right heur, call me a liar, gin'ral," cried Frank Gourard, as he rode into the timber by the side of the general and beheld the bodies of the dead Indians, the smoldering fire, and the general appearance that a hot fight had been waged there.

"There has been hot work here, guide; but I am glad I do not see Buffalo Bill among the slain."

"No, Bill are ther kind o' pilgrim that cashes a durned sight o' checks, but don't git his own chips salt in somehow; but thar are

* Buffalo Bill has served under the most prominent Indian fighting generals upon the plains, among whom may be mentioned Sheridan, Crook, Terry, Custer, Carr, Merritt, Gibbon, Royall, Mills, and many others, and the author thinks he can boldly assert that there was not one of them that did not regard the famous scout with high esteem and feelings of real friendship.—THE AUTHOR.

ther clown o' ther menagerie," and having ridden near to the scene of the fray, Frank Gourard caught sight of Ginger Sam bound to the tree.

The general and the guide at once rode toward him, and the captive scowled savagely at them.

"Who are you?" asked General Carr.

"A blind man c'u'd see I were a poor felier in misfortin'," was the surly answer.

"And a blind man could tell by your response, sir, that you are very insolent," quickly returned the general, nettled by the words of the prisoner, and disgusted with his cruel, evil face.

"P'raps this heur little dockymint may tell yer suthin, gin'ral," and Frank Gourard took from the tree the slip of paper left by Buffalo Bill.

"Ha! it is from Cody."

"Then he are right side up with car'?"

"Yes, and hear what he says," and General Carr read the note aloud.

"Jerusalem fleas! you is then Ginger Sam?" cried the guide, dismounting and facing the captive.

"No! Bufler Bill are a howlin' liar."

"He don't like me fer nothin', an' jist trumped up thet lie ter git ther gin'ral ter shoot me," said the captive.

"I guesses not, fer Bufler Bill hain't afeerd ter burn a leetle powder hisself, in a good service, like killin' you, ef yer is Ginger Sam."

"I say I hain't."

"Waal, I has seen yer advertized, an' I remembers it said yer hed one ear cut through by a bullet, thet left a round hole an' a scar behint it, an' ther third finger o' yer left hand were missin', not to speak o' ther fact thet yer hed a pair o' spades crossed, drawed inter yer hide on yer right arm with Injun ink."

With his knife the guide ripped up the sleeve of the captive's left arm, and the "crossed spades" pricked into the skin with India ink were revealed.

"Oh, gin'ral, this are Ginger Sam," cried the guide.

"I have heard of the wretch, and as Cody leaves it to me to deal with him, I shall order a platoon and have him shot, as soon as the command comes up," responded General Carr, sternly.

"They shoots brave men, gin'ral, an' hangs things like him," said Frank Gourard.

"It is a most disgusting sight, guide, to see a human being dangling in the air at the end of a rope, no matter what his crimes may have been to cause such a fate, and I am not the one to order such a spectacle.

"I have heard of this man and his numerous crimes in the past, and as he has been sentenced to death, I shall execute him without delay.

"Now, sir, if you dare raise your face toward heaven, ask for mercy after death, for you have not half an hour to live," and General Carr fixed his gaze sternly upon the outlaw, whose face was livid, and whose whole form trembled with terror, for he felt that there would be no mercy shown him on earth, and he dared not hope for any from Heaven.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN INTERRUPTED EXECUTION.

GENERAL CARR was no man to trifle, and knowing something of him, and of his valuable services upon the plains when colonel of the gallant Fifth Cavalry, Ginger Sam was aware of that fact, and set it down in his heart that he must die.

The outlaw had a cringing fear of death, and yet had dealt many a back-handed blow at victims without mercy.

He loved life in these wild hills, hiding away from his fellow-man, rather than live in constant terror of his life ending from the end of a rope.

When he knew that certain and sudden death must follow if he remained in or near the settlements, he at once sought safety in the wilds, and many believed him dead, and the hunt for him ceased.

He had allied himself with the Indians, by being ever ready to tell them where they could get a pale-face scalp, and he had mercilessly dealt out death to any luckless trapper or hunter who boldly entered that portion of the country in pursuit of his calling and crossed his path.

Brought face to face with the end at last, and seeing the head of the column entering the timber, Ginger Sam appealed to General Carr for his life.

The general is* a born soldier, and yet one whose heart is in the right place; but he is no man to sympathize with one guilty of intentional crime, and to such can be merciless, where duty demands that he should be, so that it was with no particular amiability that he heard the pleadings of Ginger Sam for his life.

"You are showing yourself an arrant coward, as well as a hardened villain, and it is my intention to deal summary justice upon you, and upon all of your clique whom I find in these wilds, urging the Indians to make war upon your own race, and preying upon your fellow-beings with the thirst for blood that a wild beast possesses," was the stern remark of General Carr.

"I kin do you service, gen'ral, ef you spar's my poor life," whined the wretch.

"I do not believe you, and more, I do not care to accept service from such a one as you are."

"I knows Sitting Bull, gen'ral," persisted Ginger Sam.

"I do not doubt it, and more, I believe you are one of the renegades in part responsible for the evil deeds of the Indians."

"No, gen'ral; I hain't as bad as that."

"You are worse; but, tell me, do you know aught of the Custer massacre?" quickly asked the general.

"Hes that been a massacre in these parts, gen'ral?"

The officer looked the villain straight in the face, to read his very thoughts if it were possible so to do, beneath the mask of sin and assurance he wore.

"There has, sir, been a fearful massacre."

"What Injuns did they massacre, gen'ral?"

"Bah! I waste time in talking to such as you."

"Come, if you have prayers to say, say them, for my command halts here but half an hour, and half of that time is gone."

"Gen'ral, yer hain't got no right ter hang me," said the villain, assuming a bullying tone.

"I do not intend to hang you."

"Glory hally—hally—hallylujah!" shouted the wretch.

"Do not hug false hope to your heart, man, for I intend to shoot you."

"Oh, Lordy! but yer hasn't ther right ter do it."

"I shall assume the right, sir."

"They will try yer for it."

"I will take all responsibility in the matter," was the calm reply, while Frank Gourard, who stood by, said bluntly:

"Say, Ginger, ef they does anything with ther gin'ral fer shootin' yer, Gov'mint will promote him fer riddin' the kentry of sich a varmint as you be."

"Come, no more of this nonsense," said General Carr, sternly, and turning to a young officer near him he said:

"Adjutant Forbush, now that the command has arrived, detail a platoon to execute this man, and it must be done at once!"

"Yes, sir," and as the officer turned away to obey the order, Ginger Sam called out:

"Gen'ral, ef yer'll spar' my life, I'll guide yer straight to ther camp of Sitting Bull."

"I have an honest man, and a guide, here, who can do the same."

"You appeal in vain, sir, for you must die," and General Carr was turning away, when it flashed upon him to ask a few questions regarding the presence of the dead Indians there.

"By the way, answer me a few questions," he said.

"Yes, gen'ral," eagerly said Ginger Sam, catching at a ray of hope.

"Who killed those Indians?"

"Buf'ler Bill kilt some, an' I kilt t'others, fer I comed jist in time ter help him out o' a scrape."

"Where are their ponies?"

"Buf'ler Bill tuk 'em with him."

"And Cody bound you here, after your aiding him, you say?"

"Yas, gen'ral."

* General E. A. Carr is now one of the most distinguished officers in the service, and deserves the honors he has won, and wears them like the true soldier he is.—THE AUTHOR.

"Lordy! I blushes ter heur that liar lie," said Frank Gourard.

"One question more:

"Who is buried in that grave?"

"Some Injun Bill Cody recognized as a old pard, and planted him decent like, fer friendship sake."

"Who killed him?"

"Bill an' me both got our work in on him."

"Who were he?" asked the guide.

"The Sioux warrior they calls ther Leaper, ther Flyer, an' sich."

"Ha! is that famous Sioux brave dead?" cried General Carr.

"He lies under that yarth thar, gen'ral, and so oughter be; but now yer'll spar me fer ans'in' yer questions, won't yer, gen'ral?"

The general made no reply and walked away, while Frank Gourard said, in a disgusted tone:

"Yer oughter be shooted fer bein' so 'feerd ter die."

"But ther platoon are yeady, sinner pard, so yer better 'rastle with yer pra'ers lively ter ther hymn o' Hallylujah, fer ther sojers is a-tunin' ther orgins ter play ther Dox'ol'gy."

The doomed man groaned in anguish of spirit, and as the sergeant came forward to untie his bonds and lead him to the place of execution, he trembled so that he excited the mingled pity and disgust of all.

He could hardly walk to the grave which had been hastily dug for him, and when he looked down into its loathsome depths a cry of horror burst from his lips and he would have fallen had not the sergeant upheld him.

"Say, pard, be a man, an' don't make me 'shamed o' bein' a human," said the guide, hoarsely, stepping to the aid of the sergeant.

The poor wretch tried to brace up, and managed to stand without support, but the crimes of his life trooping before him, and death at hand to avenge them, caused him to droop his head upon his breast and groan in anguish.

All was now in readiness for the execution, and a moment more would have ended the painful scene, when suddenly there came the rapid fall of hoofs, and there dashed upon the scene Buffalo Bill.

His horse was panting and covered with foam, and as the scout threw himself from the saddle he cried quickly:

"General Carr, I beg you not to execute that man!"

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNSOLVED MYSTERY.

ALL looked up in amazement at Buffalo Bill's sudden coming upon the scene, and with the appearance of having ridden hard to get there.

His face was flushed, and he seemed both anxious and glad that he had arrived in time to save the life of the miscreant.

As for General Carr, he was certainly surprised, but said in his pleasant way:

"I am glad to see you, Cody, though you come to save the life of this wretch."

"Thank you, general, but I do ask it as a special favor to me, if you can grant it, that you will spare the man's life and turn him over to my keeping."

"For you to be his executioner, Cody?" said the general, with a smile.

"Oh, no, sir! but I have a reason for asking the favor that I cannot now explain."

"You arrived just in time, Cody."

"Then you will spare his life, general?"

"Yes, Bill; as you ask it, I cannot refuse, for he is your game, only turned over to me for execution," frankly said the officer.

"Thank you, sir."

"An' I thanks you, Bufler Bill, from my heart, I does," cried the miserable wretch.

Buffalo Bill wheeled upon him with flashing eyes as he said:

"I wish no thanks from you, Ginger Sam."

"I would prefer your curses."

"But I need you, and with the general's consent, I will take you with me."

"Leave us a lock o' his ha'r, Bill, for I has a sneakin' idee he hain't goin' ter remain in good health long," said Frank Gourard the

guide, and in spite of discipline his words caused a laugh.

"But, Cody, you do not intend to leave us again?" said the general.

"Yes, sir, I must, for I am on a trail I must follow to the end."

"The madman's?"

"He is still ahead of me, sir, though I overhauled him at this point just after dawn this morning."

"I know'd thar hed been a cirkiss in this heur timber, an' thar animiles hed hed a turn in ther menagerie," put in Frank Gourard.

"Come, Cody, what happened?" asked an officer of the staff.

"Oh, a pack of red hounds jumped the Mad Hercules, and were worrying him when I came up."

"Well?" said the general, with a quiet smile.

"I sailed in, general. Red-skin there got a wound which sent him hoofing it into the thicket yonder, and when I got back Crazy Grizzly and the Injuns had skipped off."

"Except the dead," remarked General Carr, dryly.

"Yes, sir, they tarried."

"You killed several, of course?"

"Old Soft Head was cashing red-skin chips pretty lively when I arrived; but there's my sacrifice offering to Custer's memory," and he pointed to the scalps of the red-skins that were lying near an open grave, which the soldiers were digging for them.

"Why did you not take the scalps of the others, Bill?" asked the adjutant.

"Their hair did not belong to me, and the Mad Shanghai was in too great a hurry to play barber."

"And that wretch there, what aid did he give you?" and General Carr pointed to the prisoner, who stood with bowed head and in silence near them.

"He came pretty near killing me, and would have done so, had he not allowed his curiosity to get the better of his judgment."

"It may be all right for a woman to make such a mistake, but not for a man."

"Pray explain, Bill."

"In a few words Buffalo Bill told of the circumstance of his meeting with Ginger Sam, and what followed, and Frank Gourard muttered:

"Ther Boss o' ther Big Horn, he calls hisse'f, do he?"

"Waal, ef he hain't ther Boss o' Big Liars, set me down right now as ther father of 'em all, even ef thar do be a high-toned gent from Hotland thar lays claim ter thar name."

"And that there is the grave of the Sioux warrior noted as the Flyer?"

"Yes, general, and he well nigh made me a believer in spooks and goblins, I can tell you," and the scout told of his mysterious adventures with *Ne-ta-ka*, and added:

"He was sent by Bill Bevins to trail me from the Big Horn battle-field and get my scalp, and he came very near getting it for a tassel for the war-bonnet of the old renegade; but I must be off, for I have work ahead of me."

"Press on hard, general, on the trail of Sitting Bull, and I'll try and meet you beyond the Yellowstone with tidings."

"You do not intend to carry out your foolhardy intention of going to the Indian village, Cody?"

"I've got to keep my promise to Miss Feather Feet, general," said Bill, with a light laugh, and he turned toward the prisoner, fastened the end of his lariat securely around his waist, binding his hands behind him, and, with a salute to the general, and a wave of his hand in farewell, said, sternly:

"Now, Ginger Sam, git!"

"Whar, Pard Bill?"

"To your cabin."

The man started, shrunk back, and seemed inclined to rebel.

"To your cabin, sir, or stay here, and occupy that home."

Buffalo Bill pointed at the open grave, and with a shudder the outlaw walked away, taking the trail leading down the river, and leaving all gazing after them with interest, and whose thoughts Frank Gourard echoed with the words:

"Thet Bill Cody are playin' some deep game, an' usin' Ginger fer ther seasonin' of it!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LIFE-DEBT PAID.

I WILL now return to the movements of Buffalo Bill prior to his return to the timber just in time to prevent the execution of the man who deserved death for his crimes as surely as any one ever did.

After crossing the river he readily followed the trail of the ponies kidnapped by the Mad Hercules, and it led into a most hilly country, ere he had gone a couple of miles.

Suddenly, as he turned into a canyon, he came upon a startling scene, and one which required nerve and quickness to prevent from becoming a frightful tragedy.

At bay, in a recess of the canyon, was a woman, her back toward the scout.

She knelt upon one knee, had a long-bladed knife in her right hand, the arm being enwrapped in a buckskin mantle.

Her left hand clutched a revolver about the middle, for the weapon had evidently been emptied of its charge, and it was half-raised, as though also to be used as a means of defense.

Before the woman, and just rearing up for the fatal embrace, was a large bear, and the game he was seeking was before him.

In some way the bear had cornered the woman in the little recess of the canyon, cutting off all escape, and she had turned and prepared to fight for her life.

The black hide of the bear was stained red in several places, showing that the woman had used her revolver to the best advantage; but the wounds served to enrage the brute, and the struggle would have ended quickly for its human foe, but for the ringing crack of a rifle that brought the brute to the ground.

But he was not killed, and he staggered to his feet just as Buffalo Bill rushed in upon him and began to empty his revolver into his huge body at close quarters.

Several shots were fired before the beast succumbed, and, as he dropped dead, the scout's hand was grasped firmly, and he turned to behold before him the one whose life he had saved.

He saw a young girl, with a skin almost as dark as an Indian's, a face that was handsome, with dark, lustrous eyes, and a wealth of jet-black hair.

A head coronet, with feathers, sheltered her head, and she was clad in buckskin leggings, hunting-shirt, and a patch-work skirt reaching to her knees, and made from the skins of a score of animals.

Her small feet were incased in moccasins, and about her slender waist was a belt, with an ammunition-pouch, and a holster for her revolver, and a scabbard for her knife, while at her back was a quiver devoid of arrows, and a broken bow lay a few paces distant.

"Buffalo Bill!"

She uttered the name softly, still grasping his hand, and her face flushed with joy.

"Ella Wesley! and here in the Big Horn Mountains?" cried Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, I am Ella Wesley, but grown from the girl of fifteen, when you knew me, to the woman of twenty," she said, sadly.

"Still you are the same brave girl that saved my life seven years ago, Ella, and I have not forgotten it; but I missed you from the settlement; and none knew where you had gone."

"No, I left secretly."

"And why?"

"Don't ask me, Bill," she said, in a tone of deep sorrow.

"Poor girl, I am afraid you have had your sorrows: but I would not be here now, if you had not saved me that night, when the road-agents were coming to lynch me, and I am ever your friend."

"You have just canceled the debt, Bill, for in going for that old bear I bit off more than I could chew," said the girl, in a bold, reckless way, and with a light laugh.

"Yes, he would have done the chewing, Ella; but why did you try to bag such big game?"

"I hunt most of the time, Bill, for I have little else to do, and I have frequently killed game as large; but his hide was tough. I shot my quiver out upon him, emptied my six-shooter into him, broke my bow over his head, and then ran for base like a quarter horse."

"But I took the turn in here, and got shut off and eunched."

"You are a daisy, Ella," said Bill, with a laugh at the girl's spirited recital of her adventure.

"Yes, ther Boss Girl o' the Big Horn, as my father calls me, and that is not saying much, as I am the only one in this region."

"Your father, Ella?"

She started, and her face flushed and paled, while she answered:

"Yes, my father; but don't give me away, Bill."

"I don't exactly see how I can."

"To be square, Bill, I'll tell you a secret, if you'll keep it dark."

"I'll not betray you, Ella."

"Well, the old man is prowling round about here now, so I'll have to be quick, and then say good-by; for I cannot ask you home—God help the name!—as it would end in a Kilkenny cat fight between you and the old man."

"With chances in favor of the old man, I guess, from what you say?" laughed Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, for he's the best behind-your-back shot I ever saw."

"But he's my father, Bill, and my duty is to him, though, had I been educated, as I am now," and the girl laughed recklessly, "I'd never have been the Big Fool of the Big Horn that I am."

"But you know the family in which I was living when you met me?"

"Your uncle, John Logan?"

"No uncle, but John Logan all the same."

"My father had a hold on him, in some way, and Logan and his wife took me to live with them, and called me their niece."

"Well, one day uncle Logan, as I called him, told me my father had sent for me, and I went with him to a point where I met my paternal."

"He told me to come with him and I came, and he brought me here to these mountains, and here I have been ever since."

"It's a nice place to hide, Ella."

"Tip-top, isn't it, and that's just what we, or rather *he*, is doing. But you won't give it away, Bill?"

"Ella, don't they call your father Ginger Sam?" suddenly asked the scout.

"Yes, Bill, that was his nickname; but do not speak of his being here."

"Do you love him very dearly, Ella?"

"Yes, Bill, though I know his faults."

"The fact is, my poor mother loved him, and he was good to her, and to me, when I was a little girl."

"One day my mother told me she feared father was a very bad man, for he was never at home hardly, and from that time she faded away, and a year after died."

"Father came to her funeral, and she was buried at night, and by him and John Logan, and then I went to the Logans to live."

"He is good to me, and I fear would be much worse if it were not for me."

"But he is all I have in the world to love, and if he should die, I would take my life, for I do not care to live."

Buffalo Bill started and turned pale, while he seemed lost in deep thought.

Then he said quickly:

"Ella, I will tell you frankly that your father is a prisoner—"

"Oh, save him, Bill, for the love of God!" cried the poor girl in a frenzy.

"I will do all that I can."

"Go from here to your cabin, and leave your trail so that I can readily follow it, should I be too late, for I will come there."

"If I am not, I will have your father guide me there."

"He will die first, Bill."

"No, he will do as I ask him."

"Now I must be off, and you go too."

"But I'll skin the bear first."

"D—— the bear," cried Bill, with more energy than politeness, as he threw himself upon his horse, rode to the river, and swimming across, struck out for the little army under General Carr, with the result which the reader has already been made acquainted with.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GINGER SAM'S DARING DASH.

UPON leaving the temporary camp of the soldiers with his prisoner, Buffalo Bill started down the river, as I have said.

After getting out of sight, he said:

"You've got good vehicles for moving

along. Ginger Sam, so keep 'em rolling lively, for I am in a hurry."

The man quickened his pace without a word, and holding on to the lariat the scout rode behind him.

The traveling was far better than upon the other side of the river, and they made good time for a couple of miles.

Just what he intended to do with him Buffalo Bill had not decided upon.

To save him he had acted wholly from impulse, his heart getting the best of him, out of a friendly regard for the unfortunate daughter of such a man.

She had certainly saved Bill, at a time when there would have been no hope for him, and he had always felt toward her the greatest gratitude.

When scouting in the vicinity of John Logan's cabin, after his rescue by her, he always went to see her, and never failed to carry her some little souvenir of his appreciation for the service she had rendered him.

She was hardly more than a child then, and it had pained him one day, when he halted at Logan's cabin, to have it told him that she had mysteriously disappeared.

It was hinted to the scout by her supposed uncle that she had fallen in love with some young border sport, and run off with him, and now, years after, he found her a huntress of the Big Horn, living in the wilds with a man whom he knew to be the vilest of the vile.

Pitying her, he had gone back to the command, where he feared he might be detained by the general, on account of his determination to keep his promise to Feather Feet.

Confident that the scout had formed some deep plan of action in regard to his return to the Indians, the general had made no effort to detain him, as at first he had threatened to do, though he disliked to see him depart upon an expedition of such great peril.

After gaining a point where the trail led across the river, Buffalo Bill said:

"Cross over, Ginger!"

"What does yer want ter cross fer?" was the surly response.

"I have my reasons, so wade in."

"No; I don't keer ter git wet."

"Very well; take the back trail for the command, and take your chances with the platoon," said Bill, indifferently.

The outlaw shuddered, and replied quickly:

"I'll cross the river."

"Right are you, Sammy, my boy."

Into the water they went, and once on the other shore, where a number of cattle trails divided, Buffalo Bill selected the one that would lead him to the scene of his adventure with Ella Wesley and the bear.

"Thet trail only goes up inter ther hills," said the outlaw, nervously.

"It is into the hills I wish to go."

"Ther' hain't nothin' up thar yer wants."

"There's where you are off your base, Ginger, for there is."

"What does yer want?"

"I desire that you shall take the quickest route to your cabin."

"I'll die fust," was the savage reply.

"You had better do as I ask, for I am not one to palaver."

"I'll not go a step."

"Then I'll lead you there," was the quiet reply.

The outlaw saw that Buffalo Bill knew more than he told him, and his thoughts flashed like lightning through his brain.

His eyes falling upon the lariat end, held loosely in the hand of Buffalo Bill, his eyes suddenly gleamed with some inborn resolve, and he said, resignedly:

"Waal, pard, as I don't know thet I kin kick ag'in' yer, I'll do as you say."

"Right, Sammy."

"Now move on!"

The outlaw obeyed, taking the trail once more with nimble step.

As it wound along the edge of a ravine, through the bed of which dashed a stream, the outlaw suddenly sprung over the precipice into the depths below.

Buffalo Bill caught hard at the end of the lariat, as it tightened, but could not hold on, and the end slipped through his hand, and a plunge following, told him that his captive had fallen into the waters below.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BROUGHT TO TERMS.

GINGER SAM, the outlaw, or, as he preferred to call himself, having no one to dispute the title with him, the "Boss of the Big Horn," knew exactly what he was doing when he took the seemingly fatal leap over the precipice.

He knew the hills and valleys, the trails and canyons, as he did his own cabin home, and seeing that Buffalo Bill held the end of the lariat only, with which he was bound, and that it was not made fast to the saddle-horn, or around the scout's waist, the idea struck him to attempt a bold escape.

He knew the exact point, as the trail led along the edge of the cliff, where he should jump over, and watching his chance he did so, as the reader has seen.

It was not in the strength of man to check his descent by the hold upon the lariat, which Buffalo Bill had, and could he have done so, the weight of the man, pulling suddenly upon him, would either have dragged him from his saddle, or drawn his horse over the edge of the precipice.

This Buffalo Bill saw in the twinkling of an eye, and nearly let go of the lasso.

His first thought was, of course, that Ginger Sam had attempted suicide and had succeeded.

But, hardly had the splash of the descending form reached his ears, when he was on foot and peering over the precipice.

He saw that the water was swift-flowing and deep, and that the stream wound out of sight a few rods below by turning a rocky point.

Instantly he decided upon his course, and cast aside his arms and outer clothing.

"Wait here, Red-skin, and kick the head off of anybody you see trying to steal my clothes and arms," he cried to his horse, and at once he took the leap.

It was thirty feet down to the water, but he struck feet foremost, and without injury.

In the mean time, a perfect swimmer, Ginger Sam knew just what was before him, although his arms were bound behind his back.

Keeping under water until he had rounded the point, which the current and his own efforts soon enabled him to do, he then rose to the surface and began to make for the shore.

It was hard work, with only his feet to aid his efforts, and retarded as he was by his clothing and the lariat; but he made it at last, and under the shelter of the overhanging hill had just sat down to rest, smiling grimly at his escape, when round the point shot Buffalo Bill swimming with tremendous strokes.

The hunted man uttered a cry of alarm, and springing to his feet, darted away at great speed.

But the scout had always been noted for his fleetness on foot and he bounded along at a pace that overhauled the outlaw, who was hampered too by his bound arms and the dragging lariat.

Seeing that Buffalo Bill was gaining upon him, he finally came to a halt, and sung out lustily:

"I wilts, Pard Bill."

"Don't shoot me!"

"I have nothing to shoot you with, Sammy, but I've a notion to drown you," answered Bill, as he laid no light hand upon the other's shoulder.

"Don't do it, Bill, for 'twan't no fault o' mine."

"Yer see my foot slipped when I turned round ter speak ter you, an' when I found myself free, I concluded I'd try an' stay so."

"As a scientific liar, Ginger Sam, you are 'way up; but come; you play horse, and I'll drive you back to the top of the cliff over which you accidentally fell."

"Come, no funny business, but go!"

There was nothing for the outlaw to do but to obey, and he did that promptly, taking a route that soon brought them to where the faithful horse was standing guard most patiently in the spot where his master had left him.

"Who'd 'a' thought ye'd have jumped over that precipice arter me?" said Ginger Sam, glancing at the place he had leaped from.

"Oh! I was determined to capture you,

or get your remains, Ginger Sam," was the reply.

"You is a ror'in' terner, Buf'ler Bill," said the outlaw, admiringly.

Without heeding the compliment, the scout remarked:

"You see, Ginger Sam, it would never have done for me to have lost you, after I went to the command to release you.

"If I had, there are those who might not have thought I did my duty."

"Who is them?"

"Never mind, Ginger; but just march ahead once more."

"And see here!"

The outlaw watched the scout attentively as he mounted his horse and saw him tie the lariat end around the trigger of the revolver.

Now you see, Ginger, I just cock this weapon and keep it pointed at you.

"Should you slip over another precipice, or start to run, you will pull on this trigger and the result will be that you will shoot yourself.

"Now strike the trail for your shanty, and get there as soon as possible!"

The outlaw knew that he dared not trifle, and, for fear that he might stumble and pull the trigger of the revolver, he moved off as tenderly as though he was stepping with bare feet upon broken glass, and made the remark:

"I hopes that critter o' yourn hain't skittish, fer ef he jumps, I are a goner, from ther way that weepin is p'nted."

"You certainly are, Ginger, so I advise you to end the misery as soon as you can, by striking your cabin," was the cool reply.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A QUEER ROOST.

As if he realized that there was no help for it, Ginger Sam went moodily upon his way, and after traversing a couple of miles, which led through a wild and picturesque country, he halted suddenly and faced his captor.

"Buf'ler Bill," he said, earnestly, "I doesn't know why 'twas yer saved my life ter-day, but I does know yer to be a squar' man, an' I axes of you a favor."

"What is it, Ginger Sam?"

"I are in yer power, an' helpless as a child, as yer knows."

"You is ther one ter make tarms with me, and I hes ter submit; but I does ax ther yer don't lead no man ter my cabin, an' don't tell no man what yer sees ther."

"Will yer promise me this, Buf'ler Bill?"

"Yes, Ginger Sam, if you wish it," was the frank reply.

"Good! now that I hes yer word, jist come along; but whar we go yer horse can't come."

"He can go almost where I can, Ginger."

"Kin he climb a tree?"

"Not exactly; but I have ridden him across a stream on a tree that had fallen across it."

"I b'lieve yer, fer he looks ter hev the grit you hes got."

"But he will hev ter remain below this time, Bill, tho' that are good 'commodations fer him, sich as grass an' water, where we leaves him."

Bill made no reply, and silently followed the outlaw down a narrow ravine.

It led into a small valley, to which it seemed the only egress and ingress, and the opposite side of which was sheltered by the bold, precipitous side of a lofty hill, almost rearing itself into the magnitude of a mountain.

At the base of this bluff grew a number of large-bodied, lofty trees, and to one of these the outlaw went.

"Now stake yer animile out in this heur valley, Bill Cody, an' he'll git boss feedin'."

"You are right, Ginger, and plenty to drink too."

"Now where is your perch?"

"Up thar," and the outlaw pointed upward.

"You'll never make it, Ginger."

"Yas, I will."

"Not with the sins on your shoulders."

"No, no; your road will be down when you die."

"I ain't a-talkin' about heaven, Bill."

"Oh!"

"Nary, fer I hain't no preacher; but I say

my lay-out are up thar, an' I mean son ther top o' that hill."

"How'll you make it?"

"Up this heur tree—see?"

He stepped to one of the trees that was hollow, with an opening large enough to admit a man, and reaching his hand up in the darkness caught hold of something.

"Feel this, Bill."

"What is it?—a bear's claw?"

"No, it ar' a rope ladder."

"I see."

"It runs up inter the tree nigh to ther top."

"No."

"It do fer sar'tin, so you jis' untie my arms and then go up fust."

"I'll untie your arms, but you go up first, Sammy," and the outlaw saw that Buffalo Bill doubted him.

Unfastening the lariat that bound him, Buffalo Bill set Ginger Sam free, and the outlaw at once drew himself up into the darkness of the tree.

Closely the scout followed him, and, as the rope-ladder was suspended fairly in the center, there was little difficulty in going up.

At last, as no light appeared ahead Bill called out:

"Say, old Ginger Ale, does this flue go on to heaven?"

"We'll be thar in a minute."

"Where?"

"Ter daylight, at ther hole in ther tree."

The words of the outlaw proved true, for he soon stepped out of a hole in the tree upon a limb, and sat there.

It was a long, long way back to the ground, but the outlaw seemed utterly unmoved by being at such a height.

The top of the cliff was yet some forty feet above them, and off from it the tree stood half that distance.

The scout saw two stout strings going off from the tree over the edge of the cliff, and hold of these Ginger Sam took, while he said:

"Yer see these heur strings can't be seen from below, but they is fastened to each end o' a rope-ladder."

"See, I pulls this one, an' it brings one end o' ther ladder over to ther tree, and makes it fast to this limb."

"When I pulls ther other string, it drags that ladder back out o' sight."

"Hain't that prime?"

"It is indeed; but is this the only way you have of getting to your roost?"

"It are."

"Then how did you first get there, when you had no ladder?"

"Does yer see that stump growin' close in under ther bluff?" and the man pointed down from his dizzy height.

"Yes."

"Waal, thar growed ther boss tree of 'em all, an' its limbs went up over the edge of ther bluff."

"I jist made me suthin' ter fasten ter my feet, ter give me a hold with, an' one day I clum up heur, an' found ther place I wanted ter occupy."

"Then I froze to this holler tree, got my rope-ladders in workin' order, an' burnt t'other tree down."

"Does yer see?"

"I do."

"Waal, how is yer head on ther dizzy?"

"It is solid."

"It don't swim?"

"Only in the water."

"Then foller me, arter you see me reach ther bluff by this heur rope."

"No, if it is just the same to you I'll go with you."

"Ther rope-ladder might break."

"Yes, and it might break with me on it alone."

"No, I'm too high up to try experiments, Sammy."

"Does yer think I'd cut it loose?"

"I do."

"Waal, waal, to think I'd take such a' on-mean advantage."

"No, I'd take a tumble, that is all, and if we go over to the bluff, it's got to be united we crawl, divided we fall."

"Waal, I'll risk it."

"I would if I was you, for that rope will hold my horse, if it is made firm at each end."

The outlaw was evidently thwarted in his little plot; but he said nothing, but hooked the ends of the rope ladder over the two stout pegs, driven into the tree, and then passed one of the lines up over a branch, so that they could be unhooked by it, after the perilous trip to the bluff had been made.

Venturing upon the rope-ladder, Bill instantly followed, and the two mounted together.

Once upon the bluff the outlaw unhooked the ladder from the tree, and drew it back with the aid of the lines, while he said:

"Now not a Injun's eye kin see them lines from below."

In the mean time Buffalo Bill glanced around him.

He saw that they stood upon a plateau of a lofty hill, with precipitous sides upon every hand and the way they had come to it was about the only way that it could be reached.

There was a windlass with a long rope and wicker-work box attached, back from the bluff, evidently used in drawing up game from below.

The plateau was a couple of acres in size, and mostly covered with dwarf trees growing in thickets.

Within one of these stood a cabin, well built, and evidently comfortable within, from its appearance without.

A spring bubbled up from the rocks in one place, and found its way down over the cliff at another point, and the view from the plateau upon every hand was superb.

"Well, Ginger, you live 'way up," said Buffalo Bill, glancing around him with the deepest interest.

The outlaw made no reply, but led the way to the cabin.

It was unoccupied.

It had two rooms, and the furniture was evidently the handiwork of the outlaw, such as it was, for it consisted of a table, two chairs, and a bed in one room, the clothing of the latter being blankets and bear-skins.

The other room had simply a bed in it and a chair, yet was neat in appearance, and the walls were hung with the skins of various wild beasts, while an immense buffalo-robe served as a carpet for the floor, of which it covered nearly all of the space.

"Waal, Bill, heur yer is at my home, an' yer is welcome."

"Jist 'scuse me a minute, while I see ef thar hain't suthin' ter eat about heur, fer I are a leetle hungry."

"And so am I, Ginger; but who occupies that other room?"

"That were my son's room; but he got kilt one day."

"Ah! but hold on, and I'll search the ladder with you, for, Ginger, I feel too fond an attachment for you to let you get out o' my sight."

"Yer doesn't think I c'u'd escape, does yer?" sullenly asked the man.

"No, but I might, you know."

"You?"

"Yes; a gun might go off, you know, and where would I be?"

"You still doubts me, Bill."

"I do; but see, your ladder is moving."

The man started, turned pale, and then said, bluntly:

"Bill, I hes told you a lie."

"You never told aught else, Sammy."

"I told yer my son hed thet room; but it are my darter's room, an' she are a-comin' now."

"Now yer knows my secret."

"Yes, and knew it before, you old sinner," was the cool reply.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TREACHEROUS SHOT.

"YER know'd it! yer know'd it! that I had a darter?" yelled the outlaw, almost fiercely, as he heard the words of the scout.

"Wait and see if your daughter does not know me," was the calm reply.

The outlaw did wait, savage in expression, and trembling, while his eyes were fixed upon the edge of the bluff, which the rope-ladder had been drawn over until it became taut.

The scout waited too, and soon there appeared over the bluff the handsome face of Ella Wesley.

Seeing her father first, she gave a cry of joy, as she sprung upon the rock and ran to

ward him, and then beholding the scout, who stood half-concealed in the doorway of the cabin, she cried:

"Father, you are free, and I owe it to you, Buffalo Bill."

"Ha! you does know this man, Ella?" cried the old villain.

"I should think so," she answered, looking from one to the other.

"And you know her?"

"I should remark, for she saved my life years ago, Ginger Sam."

"And he saved mine to-day, and your life too, father, for I saw the soldiers go by the Eagle's Nest and neither you nor Bill being with them, I came home."

"Waal, waal!"

"You seem all broke up, old man," said Buffalo Bill.

"I am."

"Is it such a remarkable thing for us to know each other, father?" asked the girl.

"No, only you didn't speak o' knowin' him, and now I guesses I understands who yer meant when yer told me yer kinder hanker'd arter a han'some scout, an'—"

"Father! father!" cried the girl.

"Well, Sam, I did not know until to-day that Ella Wesley was your daughter, and you owe it to her that you are alive now, for I set you free for her sake only, and I came here with you to make you give me your pledge never to turn your weapons against your own race again except in self-defense."

"Your word I consider worthless, but your daughter shall keep watch on you, and if you do war upon your own people, who may happen to come into these hills her duty will be to send me word, for without her pledge to do so I will not leave you here, but carry you back to General Carr, and ask him to hang instead of shoot you."

"Do you hear?"

"I does," was the sullen reply.

"And you accept my terms?"

"I does."

"And you, Ella, will swear not to defend your father, but frankly send me word to Fort Fetterman if he breaks his pledge?"

"I will, Bill, for I am glad that he will have a restraint upon him."

"I have lived in these wilds with you, father, because I loved you, and not a murmur have you heard from me."

"I have overlooked your crimes because I knew you were hiding to save your life; but I will do so no longer."

"If you remain here, I will stay with you; but if you kill white men who rove through these mountains wantonly, for fear they may betray your presence here, I will do as I pledge myself to Bill Cody to do."

"Go and give it away whar I am, I s'pose?"

"Yes, father, that is just what I'll do," was the firm response.

"And then, old man, if I get my grip on you, not even your daughter can shake it off, and up you go to a tree."

"I'll not tarn my rifle on human bein' ag'in, Bill, unless it be a Injun as wants ter scalp me."

"See that you do not."

"Now I must be off, for I have a trail to find before dark."

"No, Bill, stay and have some dinner first," said Ella Wesley, earnestly.

"Yas, Bill, forgit I are as bad as I be, an' stay an' eat su'thin' with us," urged the outlaw, in a tone of humiliation.

Buffalo Bill readily yielded, and the girl set about preparing a repast of the best the cabin could afford, and as Ginger Sam was a good provider, sending by the Indians twice a year to buy provisions from the sutlers, there was a chance of a very good meal.

Interested in glancing about the strange abode, Buffalo Bill strode here and there, while waiting for dinner, and no longer looking upon Ginger Sam as dangerous, paid little attention to him.

At last dinner was ready, and it was with real relish the scout sat down to enjoy the meal, and again and again complimented the young girl upon her skill as housekeeper and cook.

Ella ate, however, with little appetite, and her father with far less, and it was left to their guest to do justice to the dinner.

The young girl seemed sad and absent-minded, though she tried to appear pleasant,

and Ginger Sam was certainly in a humor that was by no means agreeable.

At last he said:

"I tell yer, Bill, I hes hed sich a turn terday, I'm all upset, so you an' the gal talk tergether, while I takes a look outside."

He left the cabin, and neither Buffalo Bill nor his daughter caught the look of fiendish hatred upon his evil face.

Had the scout done so, he would never have allowed him out of reach of his good right arm.

Once outside of the cabin, and Ginger Sam's eyes became fixed upon an object that stood upon one side of the door.

It was the Winchester rifle which Buffalo Bill seldom allowed three feet from him.

His belt of arms he had on, but his rifle he had left there when he went in to dinner, feeling no longer dread of treachery upon the part of the outlaw.

But he knew not how black was the villain's heart who had asked him to sit at his table with him.

Seizing the weapon he strode around the cabin until he came to a window which he knew Buffalo Bill sat with his back to.

Glancing in cautiously, he saw that he was unobserved, and carefully he examined the weapon to get the working of it, for he had never seen a rifle like it before.

Apparently satisfied at last, he again stepped to the window, gently placed the muzzle inside, and ran his eye along the sights.

With long and cool deliberation he took aim, muttering to himself:

"Now, Buf'ler Bill, ther secret o' my den won't be known to any man, fer I stops your tongue right heur, an' with yer own weepin."

His finger then touched the trigger and the sharp explosion of the rifle followed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SHOT AVENGED.

THE cool deliberation with which Ginger Sam took aim to destroy a human life proved how deep-rooted in his heart was a love of crime.

Buffalo Bill had forced him to lead him to his home, and he was determined that he should never live to tell the secret he had thus discovered.

With no honor himself, or the shadow of it, he could not believe that the scout would keep his pledge not to betray him.

He had saved his neck for years by hiding like a hunted wolf in the wilds of the Big Horn, and did not intend that any stranger knowing his secret should live.

It mattered not to him that Buffalo Bill had that day saved the life of his daughter, whom he loved as the wild beast loves its young.

It was nothing to him that the scout had that day saved him from death at the hands of a platoon of soldiers, for he had no gratitude, and all men were his foes.

Hence he made up his mind that the scout should die.

The window in the rear of the cabin was quite high from the ground, so that he had to stand on tiptoe to get a good aim.

His target was the very center of the large-brimmed sombrero which Buffalo Bill wore, and which, from long habit, he had not cast aside when entering the cabin.

To shoot him through the heart Ginger Sam feared would not be sure death, and that with the powerful physique he possessed Buffalo Bill might, though fatally wounded, yet rush upon him and kill him.

A bullet through the head was certain work, and therefore straight at the head he aimed, or rather at the center of the sombrero.

With the shot there was a fall within, and the outlaw gave a yell of delight, and rushed around the cabin to view his victim, and also to make his peace with his daughter.

To his horror he ran straight into the arms of Buffalo Bill, with bare head and pallid face, just coming out of the cabin, revolver in hand.

He was too near to use the rifle, and the scout seemed not inclined to use his revolver, for, seizing the Winchester with a grip of iron, he wrenched it from the outlaw, and then grasped him with a power he found it impossible to shake off.

In vain the outlaw struggled, striving to

seize the weapons of Buffalo Bill, to use them, for he was held in a grip he could not shake off, and which seemed as sure as death.

"Treachorous fiend, come into your cabin, and behold your cowardly work!" cried Buffalo Bill, in a voice that rung like a trumpet.

To the cabin door he dragged the cowering, dreading wretch, and held his face upon the scene within.

It was enough to melt the most adamantine heart.

There, upon the floor, having fallen out of the chair occupied at the table by Buffalo Bill, lay Ella Wesley.

Upon her head was the huge sombrero of the scout, and that she was dead, no one who had ever seen death, and gazing upon her could doubt.

"There, you incarnate devil, is the one you killed.

"When I arose from the table, she playfully took my hat and placed it upon her head, at the same time taking my seat.

"Behold the result! She received the bullet intended for me, and you are your daughter's murderer."

"Oh, God!" gasped the villain, in agony.

"Of all your crimes," continued Buffalo Bill, in the same stern, almost fierce tones, "this crime is the blackest, and for it you shall suffer the worst punishment."

"Mercy! Oh, mercy! Bill, I did not mean ter kill her."

"Let me go, that I may kneel by her and ask her to forgive me!"

"She is dead, man, and can never forgive; but you shall follow her out of life, and quick too, I promise you."

"Mercy, Bill, fer I hain't fit ter die!"

"That is your misfortune and not my fault.

"Come, you must die."

"Don't kill me, Bill! don't kill me!" and the wretch groveled in the dirt at the scout's feet.

"I don't intend to kill you, vile as you are, in cold blood, as I have the power to do, but I intent that you shall meet me, knife to knife, in a struggle that can end only in your death or mine."

The proposal was by no means an unfair one, as far as the two men were concerned, for Ginger Sam was fully as large as Buffalo Bill, and he was a man of iron muscles and great powers of endurance.

But he did not take to the proposition kindly, for he said:

"I am no match for you, and you know it."

"Bah! I remember that it was once your boast that you were the worst hand with the knife upon the border."

"I were a young man, then, Bill."

"You are only about forty-five now, and in your prime."

"Come! you have that chance for your life, for I have no time now to take you to General Carr to execute."

"Bill, let me see my little girl, for I did love her, and then you can do with me as you like."

The man's tone of voice and whole manner suddenly changed, and instinctively Buffalo Bill released his grip upon him, and with bowed head he stepped into the cabin and then dropped down upon his knees by the side of the dead girl.

"Ellie! Ellie! Speak to me!"

He spoke the words in pitiful accents, and then said in a tone that touched the scout deeply:

"I brought you away here, Ellie, to in the end have you die by my hand."

"Oh, God! I cannot stand this!"

He fairly shrieked the last words, and springing to his feet, dashed by Buffalo Bill, who in vain tried to stop him, tearing his hunting-shirt off his back in the effort to do so.

With the speed of a deer, his face covered with his hands, the conscience-stricken wretch ran straight toward the cliff, and, spell-bound, the scout stood gazing after him.

With a cry that seemed like a prayer, he took the fatal leap off into mid-air, and shot down out of sight.

Back to the ears of Buffalo Bill came the sickening thud as the body struck the ground far below, and for a moment he stood almost unnerved.

But then he shook off the spell upon him

by a mighty effort, and losing no time, at once began to dig a grave near the cabin.

The earth was soft there, and with the implements found in the cabin the melancholy work was soon accomplished.

Then, wrapped in the huge buffalo-robe taken from the floor of her own little room, the poor girl was placed in her last resting-place, and with a sad heart the scout left the spot, descending to the valley below by the same perilous means he had used in ascending.

A hasty grave was then dug for the shattered remains of the dead outlaw; and mounting his horse, Buffalo Bill rode gladly away from the spot just as the sun was sinking below the horizon.

A rapid gallop of fifteen minutes brought him to the spot where he had left off following the trail of the Mad Hercules, and there he camped for the night, feeling more utterly lonely than he had ever before in his adventurous life.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BULLDOZING RED-SKINS.

It was just light enough for Buffalo Bill to see the trail left by the Mad Hercules and his kidnapped herd of ponies, when he started upon his way, and he pressed on rapidly, for he knew that his enemy had a long start of him.

Keeping Red-skin at a gentle lope, the scout followed the trail for several hours before stopping to take his breakfast, and then he halted only long enough to give his horse the necessary rest.

Flanking the scene where Custer's fatal battle had been fought, the trail of the madman had led toward the Rosebud, and the scout felt certain that he was making for his old range north of the Yellowstone, where he had been frequently seen by hunters and trappers.

From the signs he had to judge by, Buffalo Bill knew that he was gaining upon the madman rapidly.

He seemed not to understand driving ponies, and the scout could see where they had wandered off here and there, and evidently given their crazy herder much trouble.

As the trail still bore in the direction which he knew Sitting Bull must have taken, Buffalo Bill was the more willing to follow it, as he wished to settle affairs with the Mad Hercules before going on to the Indian village.

One afternoon, when near the Yellowstone, he suddenly came upon the body of a dead man.

It was dressed in buckskin, and the scout recognized it as the body of a half-breed friendly Indian, a Pawnee, whom he had frequently seen at the border forts, and knew was faithful to the whites.

He had a bullet wound in his head, was scalped, and yet had not been robbed of his arms, or a sealed envelope, which Buffalo Bill took from an inner pocket in his hunting-shirt.

The envelope remained as it had been given to the Indian courier, and was addressed simply:

"To A UNITED STATES ARMY OFFICER."

Without hesitation, as a Government Scout, Buffalo Bill tore open the envelope and read, written in a bold hand:

"I am, with fifteen cavalrymen, one white and one Indian scout, corralled on the Yellowstone, three miles below the mouth of the Rosebud, by a large force of Indians, a part of Sitting Bull's band.

"We are well fortified, but have provisions and ammunition to last us only a few days longer, so I beg aid from any officer of the army whom these lines may reach.

"The Indians in our front number about two hundred.

D. BURR,
"Capt. U. S. A."

The date on this communication was only the day before, and Buffalo Bill at once decided upon the course he should pursue.

To go back to search for any command he might find upon Sitting Bull's trail would, perhaps, occupy some time, while if he went straight to the mouth of the Rosebud he might in some way be able to effect the rescue of Captain Burr and his men.

"The killing of this half-breed is the work of the Mad Hercules, that is certain," said Bill to himself.

"But I must drop him to look after the captain."

Instantly he struck for the mouth of the

Rosebud by the nearest course, and arriving in the vicinity after nightfall, he at once sought a safe hiding-place for Red-skin, and set out on foot to reconnoiter.

It did not take him long to find out Captain Burr's little fort, which had been selected at a point that was a natural fortification, and which Bill remembered to have passed on several other occasions when hunting and scouting in that region.

Creeping as close to the Indian lines as he dared, he soon discovered that they had thinned out their force considerably, leaving only about fifty warriors to keep watch over the little party they felt so confident of starving out at a very early day.

Having discovered the true situation of affairs, Buffalo Bill set out to find where the Indians placed their ponies.

To his delight he found them in a little vale, and the closest search showed him but two guards over them, as the redskins were not expecting any foes in that vicinity.

Having made this discovery, Buffalo Bill went back to where he had left his horse, and with the aid of the war-bonnet of Yellow Hand, whom he had killed, and other Indian paraphernalia, it did not take him long to rig out in a costume that made him, in the darkness, look a red-skin of the deepest dye.

Boldly then he rode toward the corral of ponies, and only drew rein when called to by one of the guards.

His knowledge of the Sioux tongue gave him an advantage, and he instantly answered the guard that he was the Cheyenne chief, Yellow Hand, the ally and friend of Sitting Bull.

"Let my Sioux brothers mount their ponies and fly, for the pale-face soldiers come in the dark upon them, and they are as many as the leaves upon the trees.

"Quick! for the pale-faces have slain the warriors of the Yellow hand, and he flies alone to the villages of the Sioux.

In loud, earnest tones Buffalo Bill spoke, and having delivered the warning, he dashed away, leaving the two guards almost wild with fright.

Quickly there came the note of alarm, and every brave sprung to his feet, and listened to their hastily-told story.

All knew the Yellow Hand, the Cheyenne chief, and that his warning would not be idly given.

"Where went the Yellow Hand?" quickly asked the Sioux chief in command.

"Toward the north, on the trail of our people," was the answer of the brave to whom Buffalo Bill had spoken.

The red skins were loth to give up the scalps within the little fort, and were about to discuss the possibility of taking the fortification by one gallant charge, when afar off was heard a loud, ringing voice, giving stern orders, as though to men going into battle.

Some there knew enough English to understand the words:

"Forward, men!

"Steady along the line!"

This was enough for the Indians, and with wonderful alacrity they threw themselves upon their ponies and rode away like phantoms in the darkness.

Hardly had they disappeared from the position they had been besieging, when in their rear, some distance off, came shot after shot, fired in quick succession, stern orders, and the tramping of hoofs, with now and then a ringing war-cry.

With mad speed the frightened red-skins kept on, believing that an army was at their heels, following hot on their trail to avenge the Custer massacre, while the little garrison were on the alert, and feeling that help had come, made the timber echo with their cheers.

Then up to the fortification dashed a single horseman, and his words were:

"Ho, Captain Burr, be up and stirring, for there is no time to lose!"

"Hello! I should know that voice.

"Is that you, Cody?" came in manly tones in reply.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the scout.

"Boys, it's Buffalo Bill.

"Give him three rousing cheers!" cried Captain Burr.

And with good will they were given; but the scout called out:

"Mount your horses and away, captain, for you have no time to lose, for those red devils may be back upon you."

"But where is your force, and who are they, Cody?" asked Captain Burr, as he came forward to where Buffalo Bill sat upon his horse, having taking off his Indian toga.

"I'm all, sir," was the calm reply.

"Nonsense! who is with you?"

"My horse and myself, Captain Burr."

"But who was that yelling, giving orders, and firing?"

"I did it all, sir, yelled, commanded imaginary soldiers, and emptied my repeating rifle a few times.

"Fact, captain, for I found your courier dead, read your dispatch, and came on with a kind of an idea that my usual good luck would help me get you out.

"But if you don't get out of this, those reds will be back upon you."

"I'll do it, Cody, God bless you," said the captain, fervently.

"Where are your horses?"

"In our little fort."

"And well rested, so let them go hard, and strike for the Big Horn, and you'll run upon some of the columns."

"But you, Cody?"

"I'm going on a visit to Sitting Bull."

"Are you mad?"

"Perfectly sane, captain; but your men are ready, so let us move out of this, and I'll go a short distance with you; but how came you cut off 'way up here?"

"Went scouting, got chased by a large force and headed off, and had to make the best of it here, and a good little fort we had too."

"Your holding it so well proves that, as well as your own valor, captain; but who is your guide?"

"Tom Sun, and he has saved us."

"Then you need no aid from me, with Tom Sun along."

"Strike for the Big Horn, and don't tarry if you kill your horses."

"Good-night."

"Cody! Ho, Bill, what ails you?" cried out the captain, as Buffalo Bill, with his last word, put spurs to his horse and suddenly dashed away in the darkness, ere the little band of heroes had all gathered around their dashing young commander, who muttered, as he rode off, followed by his men:

"That was Buffalo Bill, I'll swear; but what in heaven's name ails him, I wonder?"

"It was Bill, cap'n, for I heard his voice, though I didn't get up to speak to him before he was gone."

"And he's stamped the whole gang of reds, and let us out of jail, so my advice is to scatter for safer quarters," said the guide, Tom Sun, riding forward and joining his commander.

"Your advice is good, Tom, so head for the Big Horn."

"Forward!" and the little band started off at a rapid gallop, happy in being released from what had threatened to be their tomb.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A GHOST-HAUNTED HERCULES.

AFTER leaving Captain Burr so abruptly, Buffalo Bill rode rapidly on, following the course taken by the stamped and thoroughly bulldozed red-skins.

He had perfect confidence in the speed and bottom of Red-skin to carry him away from any danger where fleetness and endurance were needed, and he also felt assured that he could extricate himself from any ordinary peril.

Having started the Indians on the run, he was not certain but that they would soon discover the cheat, and return after the captain and his men.

True, his having played Yellow Hand so successfully aided him greatly, for the Indians could only expect from that chief advice well intended, and that there certainly were foes outside of the little fort, and moving upon them, he had every reason to feel that they would believe.

But, to still aid the captain's escape, he had suddenly darted away, as his keen hearing had detected the clatter of hoofs some distance off.

Believing that it was the red-skins coming back, he had ridden straight toward them, intending to meet their advance by emptying his Winchester upon them, which he felt would check them for awhile, and once Captain Burr got out of hearing, he knew in the darkness they would be unable to follow his trail, and that by morning he would be too far off for them to attempt to follow.

After riding a short distance, Buffalo Bill drew rein and listened.

He still heard the clatter of hoofs, but now discovered that the sound was not before him, but off upon his right.

"It is some band of red-skins following after Sitting Bull," muttered the scout.

Still listening, he again said, as his practiced ear detected the number:

"There are not more than a dozen of them, and as I know about the course they are taking, I'll head them off and have a look at them."

"Come, Red-skin, you must work to-night."

Away bounded the horse, and after a gallop of half a mile Buffalo Bill wheeled into the edge of a clump of timber, which bordered a small prairie.

Hardly had he done so, when through the gloom a number of moving objects dashed into sight.

They were coming along near the edge of the timber that concealed the scout, and his eyes soon discovered the fact that they were ponies without riders.

Their gait was a tired gallop, and they were huddled close together.

Nearer and nearer they came to the spot where Buffalo Bill was concealed, and eyeing them closely, he soon detected that one of the animals bore a rider.

The way they headed, if nothing changed their course, he knew would bring the little herd within thirty feet of him, and still gazing at the single human being visible with them, Buffalo Bill cried suddenly, in suppressed tones of excitement:

"*The Mad Hercules, as I live!*"

Hardly had the words left the lips of the scout, before he had his lasso in hand and whirling it ready to throw.

The next instant the mustang bearing the huge madman was within easy reach, and out from the shadow of the timber shot the coil, and, expertly thrown, settled down over the shoulders of the Mad Hercules.

The start and wild yell he gave, caused the pony he rode to give a wild bound of fright, and the Mad Hercules was dragged from his back, and fell heavily to the ground.

Ere he could rise to his feet Buffalo Bill was bending over him, a revolver at his head, while he hissed forth:

"Resist and you die!"

"I will not resist, Sir Ghost," was the low reply, in a deep, tremulous voice, and the madman lay motionless.

"Sir Ghost! a healthy-looking ghost am I!" muttered Buffalo Bill.

But seeing the immense power of the man, should he choose to exert it, and not wishing to kill him, but to find out all he could about him, he humored the idea, and answered in deep, sepulchral tones:

"See that you obey me then, in all things."

"Oh, gladly, Sir Ghost!" was the response, in the same low tone.

"Arise and follow me!"

The giant obeyed most humbly.

"Now, why have you run from me as you have?"

The madman was silent, and Buffalo Bill muttered to himself:

"I must play this ghost business heavy while it is dark, for when the daylight comes he'll bounce me for a fraud."

Then in louder tones he said:

"Why have you run from me as you have?"

"I feared you."

"Ah, yes."

"Do you know whose ghost I am?"

"Mark Morgan's."

"Yes, yes; the miner captain who was killed in California some years ago."

"Yes; I killed you and your four pards for your money," was the whispered reply.

"Yes, so you did; and I have been looking for you ever since."

"You told me you would haunt me, you

remember, and it was to keep you from saying that, that I stabbed you again."

"So it was; so it was."

Buffalo Bill, when the madman mentioned the name of Mark Morgan, at once remembered that a miner and his four companions had been killed in California some years before.

Bill had known Mark Morgan, and remembered how wonderful was the likeness between the miner and himself.

Who were the murderers of the party none could really tell; but now the mystery was solved.

Again addressing the Mad Hercules, Bill said:

"You killed me and my comrades for our gold."

"Yes; but I did not touch it, for I dared not do so after the deed I committed, and I fled to the mountains, and I have wandered about hoping you could not find me, but you have."

"Oh, yes, that is an easy thing for a ghost to do."

"I'd have found you sooner, only I had other work to do; but tell me, why have you been such a murderer, and killed pale-face and red-skin alike, wherever you have met them?"

"I could not help it, ghost, after I had once stained my hands in human blood."

"Because I was a giant, folks laughed at me, and it made me mad, and since I killed you, something in my brain has said to me all the time:

"Kill! kill! kill!"

"Well, you have obeyed the order pretty well; but I want you to go with me."

"I will, ghost."

"You are not afraid of the living?"

"No, I hate and kill them!" he said fiercely.

"But you are afraid of ghosts?"

"Yes."

"You are right."

"Now your ponies have stopped yonder, I see, so I will catch you one, and you must go with me."

"Where?"

"To Sitting Bull's camp."

"Can I kill him and his braves?" asked the madman, as innocently as a child.

"Yes, the whole gang, if you wish to."

"Now wait here until I catch one of your ponies for you," and with perfect confidence that his supposed supernatural existence would keep the giant in subjection, Buffalo Bill mounted Red-skin and soon lariated one of the ponies the madman had so persistently driven from the Big Horn.

Standing where he had left him was the Mad Hercules when he returned, and bidding him mount, Buffalo Bill rode away, followed by the poor crazed being whose crimes, for the love of gold, had dethroned his reason and sent him a raving maniac through the wilds of the Yellowstone, with but one idea, to kill, and thus add to the list of his red deeds.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TIGERS UNLOOSED.

RETREATING from the valley of the Big Horn, where his merciless hand had fallen upon General Custer and his men, Sitting Bull pitched his village in a position from which he knew it would be almost impossible for the pale-faces to dislodge him.

As the time wore away and the different bands of warriors came in, they all had strange stories to tell of their adventures.

One warrior reported that he had been a captive to the pale-faces, and had heard how the great white hunter, *Pa-e-has-ka*, had killed the Cheyenne chief, Yellow Hand, and two of his warriors in a battle, single-handed, with them.

Two others had to tell how they were all that had escaped of their scouting party, and that they had attacked a giant pale-face, and would have killed him, had not *Pa-e-has-ka* dashed in upon them, and after killing some of their best braves caused them to fly.

Again a large band, left to besiege some pale-face braves, who had fortified themselves on the Rosebud, had a story to tell of Yellow Hand warning them of danger, and that they had fled for their lives, believing that a large force was attacking them.

But the next day a few of them returned

to the fort on a scout, to find there one of their braves who did not fly, because he had a broken leg, and that he, having lived long with the pale-faces, spoke their tongue, and had heard how *Pa-e-has-ka* had fooled them, and laughed at them for cowards.

They had then taken his trail and followed it, to find it mingled with other trails; but, as they had double as many warriors as the pony tracks they saw, they pressed on in pursuit, to be suddenly ambushed, and have dash out upon them *Pa-e-has-ka* and the Evil Spirit of the Yellowstone.

A few of them had escaped, and they had come to tell the story.

To all these stories Sitting Bull and his head chiefs listened, and the name of Buffalo Bill, or *Pa-e-has-ka*, became a greater terror than ever, and when it was known that he had as his ally the Evil Spirit of the Yellowstone, as the red-skins called the Mad Hercules, they felt the wildest dread of what he might do next.

Among the chiefs sat one who had listened to every story told in the council-lodge, and no one would have deemed his painted face concealed the white man.

But so it was, and at last he spoke:

"*Pa-e-has-ka* is my foe, and I sought his life; but he is the pale-face brave that the Feather Feet sent to give the Sitting Bull's warning that his enemies should not follow upon his trail.

"The Feather Feet turned a tiger loose upon the trail of my red brothers, and he told her that he would return and give himself up to the Sitting Bull. *Has he come back?*

"No!

"But the warriors come in and tell how he has killed them, scalped them, and laughed at them for squaws. Will the Sioux and Cheyenne braves let the pale-face dog throw dirt in their faces? Is he not now not far from their village, and yet no warrior brings in his scalp? Let my medicine braves seek his trail and bring him alive into the presence of the great chief, and the Death Killer will show them how the *Pa-e-has-ka* will weep like a squaw when he feels the grip of his foe upon him!"

This speech of the renegade, Bill Bevins, excited the Indian warriors to frenzy, and within half an hour after it was uttered a hundred of the best braves of the tribe had gone forth to hunt down their terrible foe, who had boldly advanced within a few miles of their very stronghold.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FEATHER FEET'S PERIL.

FROM the day of his return to the gory field of the Big Horn, to take the scalp of the gallant Custer, and finding Buffalo Bill there to defend it, Bill Bevins, the renegade, had thirsted for revenge upon the scout.

He had secretly dispatched the Flyer upon his trail of revenge, and as that very daring warrior did not return, he feared that he had come to grief at the hands of the man he went to slay.

For defending the scout and permitting Buffalo Bill to go free, upon his pledge to return, the renegade had not forgiven Feather Feet.

Yet he knew the influence she held in the tribe, that upon account of her having been born with snow-white hair, and growing up far more beautiful than any maiden in the tribe, she was regarded as a favored one of the Great Spirit, and that should he cross her will, he would lose the prestige he had gained.

He had hoped to win the girl's love, when he first came to the tribe; but she had treated him with disdain; and this was another reason why he felt revengeful toward her.

To get an Indian to aid him in a plot against Feather Feet he knew was impossible, yet he did not despair, and when he left the council lodge, he determined in some way to get rid of the girl, as he hoped that Buffalo Bill might be captured, and if so, she might save him from death.

To plan and to execute, are two very different things, and so Bill Bevins found it.

But he was a good plotter, and having studied medicine before he did deviltry in early life, he knew the power of certain herbs.

Marking a powder which he knew to be a deadly poison, he went over to the *tepee* of the pretty Sioux Queen, and engaged her in conversation, asking her when the pale-face scout intended to keep his word to her and come to the Indian village?"

"The Long Hair has a straight tongue; he will come," said the young girl, confidently.

The renegade continued to argue the matter with her, and while there managed to drop the powder upon the buffalo steaks that were broiling upon the fire before the Indian girl's *tepee*.

Then he departed, satisfied with his work.

Feather Feet ate her supper with no suspicion of harm; but she did not seem to have her customary appetite, and springing upon her sportive pony took a gallop down the valley.

She passed the guards about the village, and unheeding their warning not to venture far, rode to the top of a ridge, where the cool air could blow upon her, for she felt strangely ill.

The young Indian brave who was on guard watched her attentively, as she sat there, and she having won his heart, he seemed to forget all else, now that she was before his eyes.

So wrapped up was he in feasting his eyes upon the young girl, that he did not behold a huge form suddenly bound forth from a rock near by, and when he did see it, before he could utter his defiant war-cry, his throat was crushed in a mighty grip, and he was dragged back out of sight and a long knife sent to the hilt in his heart.

Then the scalp-lock was torn from his head, ere life was extinct, and the young brave's love-dream had ended.

Seated by the side of his victim, the slayer gazed upon him with a look of real pleasure at his deed, while he muttered in a sinister tone:

"I love blood, for it is red and beautiful.

"But I won't kill her now, but take her to the ghost and kill her before him.

"Yes, I will do that, for she must die; but not now, not now.

"There! she comes! Now to catch her as she goes by."

He crouched back in the shelter of a rock as he spoke, while Feather Feet, upon whom his eyes were fixed with murderous intent, came riding slowly back toward the village.

She felt ill, hardly able to sit upon her horse, and her eyes were bent upon the ground; but suddenly she gave a cry of alarm and tried to wheel her pony about and dash away, for to her side had sprung the form of the Mad Hercules.

But he placed his hand over her mouth, seized her firmly in his arms, and turning her pony loose darted down a defile, unseen by any of the other Indian guards, nearly a quarter of a mile away.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A LAST RESORT.

In a large cavern penetrating a pile of rocks, rising to an elevation that commanded a view of the Indian village, several miles distant, sat Buffalo Bill.

He had his field glass in his hand, and had been long gazing upon the Indian camp.

"Well, I'll never get them down finer than I have them now, I fear, for the last few times I have counted the warriors, I get the number in the neighborhood of six thousand," he said, thoughtfully.

"I wish I had some one with me whom I could send back on the trail and report to the army just the situation of the village, and how many warriors Sitting Bull has; but if I were to trust that crazy Shanghai, he'd go to killing the soldiers as soon as he met them.

"I have been hanging about this village long enough now, for I have done my work well, and keep my oath to Custer," and as he spoke the relentless scout held up a long string of scalps which he had taken since the massacre of the Big Horn, and he smiled grimly at his red work.

His position was a secure one, and one which the Mad Hercules had led him to, through an underground tunnel-way known only to the crazy giant, and the entrance to which not even a warrior would suspect.

"That mad giant knows this country as an

open book, and if I had asked old Sitting Bull to pitch his village to suit me, he could not have pleased me more.

"But I am getting tired of this, and if I do not catch Bill Bevins soon, I will go boldly into the village and claim the protection of the Sacred Pipe I carry.

"I'll risk it, for I believe in its power—Ha! there comes the Mad Shanghai!

"I wonder how many curiosities in the way of scalps he has collected upon this trip?"

As he uttered the words, Buffalo Bill turned and looked back into the cavern, out of the darkness appearing as he did so the gigantic form of the Mad Hercules.

But he was not alone, for close in his brawny arms he held the slender form of Feather Feet.

She was conscious, for, fortunately for her, she had eaten so sparingly of the poisoned food that it did not accomplish the end the renegade had intended.

Catching sight of Buffalo Bill, she cried in English:

"*Pa-e-has-ka*, save Feather Feet!"

"I'll do it, girl, for I owe you an unpaid debt."

Then addressing the madman, Bill continued, sternly:

"Release that girl, sir!"

The Mad Hercules hesitated, and took out his knife, while he said, fiercely:

"I brought her here to kill her."

"You harm her, and I'll kill you, as sure as I am Buffalo Bill," and the scout drew a revolver.

"*Buffalo Bill?* Did you call yourself Buffalo Bill?"

The madman fairly shrieked the words, and his features worked convulsively.

"Yes," was the cool reply.

"Then you are not a ghost?" and the words were hissed forth as the madman stealthily advanced, throwing the Indian girl aside, greatly to her relief, as not worthy of notice.

"No, but I'll make a ghost of you if you crowd me, old man," warned the scout.

At once was the supernatural power he had so long held over the poor crazed being gone, and with a yell that echoed like thunder through the cavern the Mad Hercules rushed upon him, while Feather Feet, crouching in terror at one side, seemed to feel that the end had come for both Buffalo Bill and herself.

"Back, devil, or I will kill you, and I do not wish to do that," shouted Bill, springing backward as the maddened fiend rushed upon him.

"Kill! kill! that is what I will do," shrieked the Mad Hercules.

But, they were his last words, for, seeing that his death was certain if he hesitated longer, Buffalo Bill pulled the trigger of his revolver, and the bullet crashed through the poor, diseased brain.

With a heavy thud the Mad Hercules fell his length, his knife shivered to pieces as it struck the rocky flooring of the cavern.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PLEDGE REDEEMED.

THERE was great excitement in the village of the Sioux.

The Sioux queen, the idolized Feather Feet, had ridden away from her *tepee* and had not yet returned.

Then, too, an old squaw had reported seeing Death Killer, the medicine chief, make up a poison, and watching him, she had seen him sprinkle it upon the food the Feather Feet was preparing for her supper.

Whether this peculiar circumstance had anything to do with the disappearance of the Sioux Queen none could tell; but pale-faces generally being under distrust, Death Killer was ordered to the council-lodge by Sitting Bull to explain.

Then came the news that one of the most promising young warriors of the tribe had been slain and scalped while on guard at one of the passes to the village.

This was fearful, and Buffalo Bill was set down as the perpetrator of the deed.

While the chiefs were in council, listening to the renegade's denial of having done what he was accused of doing, a horse was seen approaching the guards at the pass where

the young brave had been killed that afternoon.

Upon his back were two persons, one of them appearing to be a great chief in full feather, and the other was Feather Feet.

The chief grunted a salutation to the guards, though who he was none of them knew, while Feather Feet spoke to them pleasantly, and said the brave Sioux had rescued her from great danger.

Straight to the council-lodge the chief and Feather Feet rode, and dismounting quickly the two entered the sacred precinct, the young girl leading the way.

A cry arose at sight of the Feather Feet, who, as the avowed Queen, had the *entree* there, and then all eyes were turned upon her companion, while she said in a voice that reached every ear in the grand lodge:

"The *Pa-e-has-ka* spoke with a straight tongue.

"He is here!"

The war-bonnet was thrown aside, and the blanket held in front of the face was removed, and *Buffalo Bill* stood revealed, alone among his enemies.

A deep murmur ran around the crowd of chiefs, and it was half surprise, half admiration at the bold pale-face who had redeemed his word to Feather Feet.

Fearlessly the scout stood before his foes, his eyes resting first upon the face of Sitting Bull, and then falling upon the renegade and resting there.

"The Long Hair has come back and now he shall die!" shouted Bill Bevins, unable to contain his joy.

"The Death Killer has spoken—the Long Hair must die!" said Sitting Bull, and the words were echoed upon all sides.

But Buffalo Bill's face never changed color, while Feather Feet cried:

"Let the Sioux Queen speak!"

Instantly there was a dead silence, and she told the story of her adventure with the madman, and how she had been saved by Buffalo Bill.

All eyes turned upon Sitting Bull, for it was for him to speak.

Deep and earnest came his words:

"The Long Hair is a mighty pale-face chief.

"He has trailed the red-man to his village, and his belt is heavy with the scalp locks of my braves.

"He came here under the war bonnet of my Cheyenne brother, the Yellow Hand.

"He bears in his hand now the leap pole of my greatest warrior, the Flyer.

"He has saved the Sioux Queen from death, and has slain the great terror of my people, the evil spirit of the Yellowstone.

"The Long Hair is not afraid of death, and he must show my warriors how he can die!"

"That settles it, Buffalo Bill, and I have triumphed!" fairly yelled the renegade.

But Buffalo Bill simply smiled and said:

"The Sitting Bull is a great chief, and *Pa-e-has-ka* has heard his words.

"*Pa-e-has-ka* has slain his young braves, and his belt is heavy with their scalp-locks.

"But does the Sitting Bull forget many moons ago, when his little daughter, the sunlight of his heart, was captured by a Pawnee brave, and that a pale-face took her from him, and gave her to the Great Chief to place again in his heart?

"The Sitting Bull gave the *Pa-e-has-ka* then this Sacred Pipe and Tomahawk with the broken edge, in token that he would never be his foe.

"See! must the *Pa-e-has-ka* die?"

As Buffalo Bill spoke, he held up the Sacred Pipe and the White Tomahawk with its edge all broken.

A death-like silence fell upon all, then Sitting Bull arose and stepping up to the scout threw around him his snow-white robe, and said, impressively:

"The *Pa-e-has-ka* is the friend of the Sitting Bull.

"When the tomahawk shall be buried between their people, they shall be brothers.

"But now the pale-faces are on the trail of my children so let the *Pa-e-has-ka* go from my village back to his people, and not one of my young braves shall follow his trail.

"The Sitting Bull has spoken."

A grunt of assent showed that the chiefs agreed with their great leader, excepting one, and that one was the renegade.

With a cry of rage he sprung toward Buffalo Bill, knife in hand.

But the blade was met by steel as sharp as his own, and held in a hand that was mightier, and in an instant of time Bill Bevins, the renegade medicine-man of the Sioux was a corpse in the council lodge.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE scene changes from the Indian village of Sitting Bull, the chief, whose strategy, cunning and bravery had defeated armies, to an encampment of soldiers upon the Yellowstone.

It is a large camp, and about it is a look of thorough discipline, even in that far-away region.

The uniforms of the men are soiled and tattered, their once bright buttons are tarnished, and their looks indicate that they have seen hard service.

Suddenly a horseman rides into the outskirts of the camp.

He is mounted upon a large bay horse that is gaunt and spirited.

The rider looks pale and jaded, and his buckskin attire has seen hard usage.

But withal he is recognized as he enters the lines, and one voice after another breaks forth in the cheer for "Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border!"

Removing his broad, worn, blood-stained sombrero from his haughty head, he rides through the ranks to the head-quarters tent and dismounts.

"An orderly seizes his bridle-rein, and a general officer comes forth and grasps his hand with the words:

"Thank God, Cody, we meet again!"

"It was close shaving, general, to make it," was the answer.

"And you made it, Bill?"

"Yes, general; I went into Sitting Bull's village, know just how many Sioux and Cheyenne braves he has, and all of interest about the really grand old red sinner that you would like to know. But you'll not catch him this year, I'll wager high."

"I fear not; but, how did you escape, Bill?"

"Through the big (medicine) charm of some sacred relics I had given me long ago by old Bull himself."

"And those scalp-locks, Bill?" and the general pointed to a string of ghastly souvenirs of death hanging from his belt.

"Oh! these are the head roofs of the braves who felt my grip, general. I intended to have a rope made of them to hang Bill Bevins with, but he persuaded me with a knife to give him a soldier's death."

"You killed him?"

"Yes, general, I had to do it, so I'll have the scalp-locks made into a bridle for you."

"Thank you, Bill; it will be a unique present, and one most highly prized. By their number I should judge that you had kept your oath to avenge poor Custer, Bill."

"Count 'em, general, and see if I did not keep my oath to Custer," was the grim response of the daring scout.

THE END.

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